DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 469 857 CE 084 000

AUTHOR	Smith, Christine; Bingman, Mary Beth; Hofer, Judy; Medina, Patsy
TITLE	Connecting Practitioners and Researchers: An Evaluation of NCSALL's Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network. NCSALL Reports.
INSTITUTION	National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, Boston, MA.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. on Postsecondary Education, Libraries, and Lifelong Learning (ED/OERI), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	NSCALL-R-22
PUB DATE	2002-07-00
NOTE	88p.
CONTRACT	R309B60002
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/research/report22/pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; Adult Educators; *Adult Literacy; Cooperation; Educational Development; Educational Innovation; *Educational Research; *Networks; Partnerships in Education; Program Development; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; Program Implementation; *Research and Development; *Teacher Researchers; *Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	Practitioner Involvement (Research); *Teacher Researcher Cooperation

ABSTRACT

The Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network (PDRN), a multi-year research and development effort, tested an innovative method of connecting research and practice. Included in the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy 1995 proposal, it began with an advisory group meeting in 1996. In 1997, South- and Northeast regions met. PDRN's first activity (state focus groups on priorities and adult literacy research) was implemented; and recruitment began for the Mid-Atlantic region. Other regions met to assess strengths and weaknesses in 1998. In 1999, Practitioner Leaders (PLs) worked on developing research projects. Regions met to assess progress in 2000. In 2001, PDRN ended. Evaluation findings indicated that supporting factors were face-to-face meetings; Regional Coordinators; PL dedication, enthusiasm, and collaboration; training in practitioner research; internal listserv; state support and funding; and teachers' hunger for information and interaction. Hindering factors were lack of clarity; lack of PDRN staff and PL time; PL and state staff turnover; lack of access to updated information about research projects; and limited support for professional development in some states. Impact was strongest on those most closely involved in its work. Lessons learned were that connecting practitioners and researchers has a positive impact on practitioners and practice and on researchers and research and that effectively connecting researchers and practitioners requires specific strategies and specific supports for PLs, local practitioners, program directors, and state staff. (YLB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 469 857

Connecting Practitioners and Researchers: An Evaluation of NCSALL'S Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network

Cristine Smith, Mary Beth Bingman, Judy Hofer, Patsy Medina, and Practitioner Leaders

NCSALL Reports #22
July 2002

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

Harvard University Graduate School of Education
101 Nichols House, Appian Way
Cambridge, MA 02138

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CE084000

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY i

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

WHAT WAS THE PRACTITIONER DISSEMINATION AND RESEARCH NETWORK? 1
RATIONALE FOR THIS EVALUATION 2

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY OF THE PDRN 5

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PDRN: 1995–1996 6
The Proposal, 1995 6
October 1996 Advisory Group Meeting 7
YEAR 1: 1996–1997 7
Connecting to States 7
Practitioner Leader Job Description 8
Regional Meetings, 1997 9
The PDRN Focus Groups 9
National Practitioner Leader Meeting, 1997 11
YEAR 2: 1997–1998 13
Practitioner Leaders' Action Plans 13
Growth of the PDRN 13
Regional Meetings, 1998 13
Staff Retreat 14
YEAR 3: 1998–1999 15
The Practitioner Research Project 15
Three Study Circles Developed and Piloted 16
PDRN National Meeting in Maryville, Tennessee 17
YEAR 4: 1999–2000 19
Continuation in the Southeast and Northeast 19
Development and Piloting New Study Circles 19
New Model in the Mid-Atlantic 20
Proposal for the Second Phase of NCSALL (2001–2006) 22
YEAR 5: 2000–2001 23
Scope of Work for the Final Year 23
Summit Focus Groups 23
Regional Meetings, 2000 23
The Final National Meeting 24

CHAPTER 3: EVALUATION METHODOLOGY 27

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS 31

WHAT DID THE PDRN DO? 31
OUTREACH/DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES: TELLING ABOUT RESEARCH 32
Research Assistance: Helping with Research 34
Professional Development: Helping Others Learn about Research 34
Practitioner Research 36
Summary of PDRN Activities 37
FACTORS AFFECTING PDRN WORK 38
Supporting Factors 39
Hindering Factors 43
Conclusions about the Factors Affecting PDRN Work 47
IMPACT OF THE PDRN 49
Impact on Practitioner Leaders and on the Students and Programs with whom They Work 50
Impact on NCSALL 56
Impact Beyond NCSALL 58
Conclusions about the Impact of the PDRN 62

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS 65

THE EVOLUTION OF THE PDRN 65
LESSONS LEARNED 66
IMPLICATIONS 76
NEXT STEPS 79

APPENDIX: PDRN CHRONOLOGY 80

TABLE OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: INITIAL PDRN PRACTITIONER LEADER JOB DESCRIPTION 8

FIGURE 2: GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PDRN 18

FIGURE 3: OVERALL EVALUATION QUESTIONS 27

FIGURE 4: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR "STORIES" 29

FIGURE 5: PRESENTATIONS AND WORKSHOPS (ALL REGIONS) 32

FIGURE 6: NEWSLETTER ARTICLES (ALL REGIONS) 33

FIGURE 7: STUDY CIRCLES CONDUCTED (ALL REGIONS AND YEARS) 35

FIGURE 8: TOTAL ACTIVITIES PER YEAR 38

FIGURE 9: FACTORS AFFECTING PDRN WORK 48

FIGURE 10: SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT OF THE PDRN 63

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NCSALL's Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network (PDRN) was a multi-year research and development effort testing a new and innovative method of connecting research and practice. Its goal was to create and support systematic partnerships between practitioners and university researchers to better connect research and practice, with the ultimate outcome of improved practice, policy, and services for adult learners.

At the heart of the PDRN were Practitioner Leaders, adult basic education teachers from 14 states who served as liaisons between practitioners and NCSALL, with support from representatives of their state departments of education and state literacy resource centers. NCSALL staff coordinated the PDRN. Practitioner Leaders shared information about NCSALL studies; identified programs to serve as research sites; conducted their own research on topics related to NCSALL research; helped other practitioners in their states research similar topics; and organized staff development activities, such as study circles, to present NCSALL research results to practitioners and encourage use of new theories or recommended practices.

Findings

We examined factors that helped and hindered the PDRN's function as a network connecting practice and research. Several factors supported the PDRN's work and development: opportunities to meet face-to-face; the existence of PDRN Regional Coordinators; the Practitioner Leaders' dedication, enthusiasm, and collaboration; training in practitioner research; the PDRN's internal listserv; state support and funding; teachers' hunger for information and interaction; and the involvement of NCSALL researchers. Hindering factors were lack of clarity while the project evolved; lack of PDRN staff and Practitioner Leader time; Practitioner Leader and state staff turnover; lack of access to updated information about research projects; the limited involvement of some NCSALL researchers; and limited support for profes-sional development in some states.

We concluded that the PDRN's impact was strongest on those most closely involved in its work, including the Practitioner Leaders and PDRN Regional Coordinators. Practitioners and students with whom the Practitioner Leaders worked directly felt the next-strongest impact, followed by practitioners who participated in PDRN-sponsored study circles and practitioner research. Greater impact might have been achieved by increasing the Practitioner Leaders' time devoted to PDRN work, the duration and number of study circles, the number of practitioners involved in research, and the involvement of NCSALL researchers and state staff in training

sessions and meetings with practitioners. These activities would have required more NCSALL funding for the PDRN as well as more state funding to support practitioner research and paid professional development.

Lessons Learned

Perhaps the most important lesson we learned through the PDRN is that practitioners are interested in research. Therefore, the PDRN's lessons should inform a larger effort in our field to help teachers and policymakers learn how to integrate information about "what works" according to research with "what works" according to their colleagues and their own experience.

The lessons from the PDRN are the following:

1. Connecting practitioners and researchers has a positive impact on practitioners and practice. Involvement with research expands practitioners' views of the adult literacy field and their role as professionals in it.

2. Connecting practitioners and researchers has a positive impact on researchers and research. Involvement of practitioners in research design, implementation, and analysis improves the quality and usefulness of the research.

3. Effectively connecting researchers and practitioners requires specific strategies, including the following:

   - Involving practitioners in research and its dissemination so they can become research consumers
   - Focusing on a limited number of research studies—preferably related to Practitioner Leaders' interests or research—to increase the ability to help colleagues understand research findings
   - Ensuring researchers and practitioners are committed to working collaboratively to strengthen connections between practice and research
   - Selecting the right Practitioner Leaders, preferably those with prior research experience or a leadership role within their state, as well as a stable job in and long-term commitment to the field
   - Holding face-to-face meetings between network members (researchers, Practitioner Leaders, and coordinators)

4. Effectively connecting researchers and practitioners requires specific supports for Practitioner Leaders, local practitioners, program directors, and state staff.

   For Practitioner Leaders, these supports include:

   - Assistance and training from their state and/or from a national organization such as NCSALL to help them think about not only their PDRN work, but also what they need to do the job well and grow
   - Adequate, funded time built into their jobs for research, professional development, and outreach
   - Clear roles and responsibilities

   For local practitioners, these supports include:

   - Activities, such as study circles and practitioner research, that involve them in their own research and with other researchers' work, combined with paid staff release time and sustained opportunities to engage in these activities
   - A practitioner in the role of "leader" who helps them connect with research and researchers
   - State support, including funding and a designated staff person

   For local program directors and state staff, states need to provide a means to develop an understanding of and systems for practitioner research and research-based professional development.

Practice, Research, and Policy Recommendations

The overall implication of our work with the PDRN is that connecting researchers and practitioners in the field of adult learning and literacy will require a national system, which we believe should connect policy and research as well. This system should operate in every state, involve all adult literacy research and researchers, and include both professional development and policy-setting activities in each state. Such a system can ensure that research findings are used in practice and that research studies are based on practice, thereby maximizing the investment of research funding. Specifically, we recommend the following:

- Provide federal and state funding for professional development activities that help practitioners understand and use research.
- Offer technical assistance to states in which delivery of research-based professional development is new.

- Develop activities, such as policy problem-solving seminars, that help policymakers understand and use research.
- Involve practitioners as both participants and leaders. Also involve and fund practitioners as co-researchers and investigators with adult literacy researchers at both the national and state levels. Provide structures that allow practitioners and researchers to interact in sustained, meaningful, face-to-face ways.
- Provide funding at the state, national, and research study level, as well as technical assistance and coordination, so that states can integrate research, practice, and policy activities into their current systems to improve service delivery.

If a system connecting practice, policy, and research is to work effectively, it can't only be a process of research *to* practice; research and its funding should also be based on the needs of practice and incorporate practitioners' input. There must be a way for practitioners and policymakers to provide input into national-level research agenda setting, funding, and design. We would anticipate two positive results: Research would more likely address the real needs of those working in adult literacy at the grassroots level, and practitioners and policymakers would be more receptive to the research because they were more involved in advocating for it. In short, practitioners and policymakers would become active research consumers.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

What was the Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network?

The goal of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) is to conduct research that can be used to improve the quality of adult basic education (ABE) in the United States and to disseminate findings in formats that practitioners—teachers, program administrators, and policymakers—can use. To ensure that the research meets adult basic education practitioners' needs and is informed by the current state of the field of adult basic education, NCSALL connects research with practice and researchers with practitioners in a variety of ways. The Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network (PDRN) has been one way in which NCSALL has linked ABE practitioners and NCSALL researchers.

The PDRN was a multi-year research and development effort meant to test a new and innovative method of connecting research and practice. Its goal was to create and support systematic partnerships between practitioners and researchers to strengthen NCSALL research and make the research results available and useful to the field. The PDRN was designed to help NCSALL researchers connect to the field and to help practitioners connect to university-based research. This was accomplished by asking practitioners to provide feedback to researchers and pilot-test research in the classroom; encouraging practitioners to research topics related to NCSALL and share their experiences with colleagues; connecting practitioner researchers and NCSALL researchers studying similar issues; and disseminating information about NCSALL research processes and results. This report describes the PDRN's work and the results of an evaluation conducted as the project was completed.

At the heart of the PDRN were the Practitioner Leaders—ABE teachers who served as liaisons between practitioners and NCSALL. Located in each of 14 participating states, the Practitioner Leaders worked with support from representatives of their state departments of education and with their state literacy resource centers to facilitate information sharing between practitioners and researchers. NCSALL staff at World Education, Rutgers University, and the Center for Literacy

Studies at the University of Tennessee—known as Regional Coordinators[1]—further supported these state teams.

Beginning in May 1997, nine Practitioner Leaders began working in two U.S. regions, the Southeast and the Northeast (New England). These Practitioner Leaders were located in Georgia (later replaced by North Carolina), Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, and Virginia. In 1999, four states from the Mid-Atlantic region were added: Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York, and New Jersey. The PDRN Coordinators supported their work. The work Practitioner Leaders carried out included:

- Presenting at conferences and sharing information about NCSALL studies ("telling about the research") through state newsletters
- Helping NCSALL researchers identify adult basic education programs willing to be research sites ("helping with the research")
- Engaging in their own classroom or program research on NCSALL-related research topics and/or assisting other practitioners in their states who conducted research on topics similar to those being investigated by NCSALL ("doing research")
- Organizing staff development activities, such as study circles, to share the results of NCSALL research studies with practitioners and encourage them to use new theories or recommended practices ("helping others learn about the research")

Rationale for this Evaluation

Our goal in conducting this research and development effort was to determine whether involving practitioners directly in learning about and disseminating research to other practitioners would be successful, and, if so, what resources and support such work requires. Thus, it is important to complete the work of such a research and development effort by evaluating and documenting what we did and what we learned from it. This evaluation will help NCSALL—and other organizations and agencies engaged in conducting and disseminating research within the field of adult basic education—learn how to better connect research and practice within our field. Any dissemination initiative should directly improve the quality of practice within adult literacy programs, and we wanted to know whether and how the PDRN was successful in that.

[1] Regional Coordinators refer to Kim Stewart and Cristine Smith (initially) and Judy Hofer (subsequently) for the Northeast region, Patsy Medina for the Mid-Atlantic region, and Beth Bingman for the Southeast region. Cristine Smith served as the PDRN National Coordinator. In the remainder of this report, the term PDRN Coordinator will be used to describe all of the coordinators. References to PDRN staff describe the PDRN Coordinators plus PDRN staff associate Sam Gordenstein.

The questions that guide this evaluation of the PDRN are:

1. What did the PDRN do (the scope and description of its activities)?
2. What were the most important factors that supported or hindered the PDRN in its work?
3. How did the PDRN have an impact on the practice and development of:
   - Practitioner Leaders?
   - Practitioners and programs?
   - State professional development systems?
   - NCSALL researchers?
   - NCSALL?
4. What recommendations for connecting research and practice can be derived from the PDRN research and development effort?

This report is organized in the same order as these questions. In Chapter 2, we present a history of the PDRN over its five years (1997 through 2001). After describing our evaluation methodology in Chapter 3, we present findings in Chapter 4 that describe the scope of the PDRN's work; factors that supported or hindered the PDRN's work; and the impact of PDRN on practitioners, states, researchers, and NCSALL itself. In the final chapter, we present recommendations about connecting research and practice that can be derived from the findings of the evaluation and the experience of the PDRN as a research and development effort.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY OF THE PDRN

The PDRN can be traced to December 1995, when it was included in the original NCSALL proposal. The PDRN concept became a reality shortly thereafter, in August 1996, when the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) notified NCSALL that its proposal bid had been successful. The PDRN got underway with the meeting of an advisory group in October 1996. The Southeast region was represented by the states of Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee, and teams from these states (Practitioner Leaders, state learning resource centers, and departments of education) met as a regional group in March 1997 to begin implementing the PDRN's mission. The Northeast region state teams (New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Maine, Rhode Island, and Vermont) also met for the first time in May of that year. The PDRN implemented
its first activity that summer, with each state assembling focus groups to survey practitioner thoughts and suggestions about the PDRN's priorities and adult literacy research in general. The findings from these focus groups were presented and analyzed in *NCSALL Reports #4:* Practitioners Speak: Contributing to a Research Agenda for Adult Basic Education (1998).

NCSALL's Harvard Graduate School of Education researchers joined the effort during the summer of 1997, meeting with the Practitioner Leaders and World Education/Center for Literacy Studies coordinating staff in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for the first PDRN national meeting. The group spent the day planning the upcoming year's activities and sharing ideas about potential practitioner research projects and the PDRN's role in future NCSALL research activities. To facilitate communication between the Practitioner Leaders and the PDRN Coordinators, the PDRN created a listserv in September 1997 as a complement to the face-to-face meetings.

In March 1998, the PDRN began recruiting Practitioner Leaders from the Mid-Atlantic region. The second round of meetings for the Southeast and Northeast regions occurred, respectively, in May and July 1998. This was an opportunity to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the PDRN circa 1998 and to discuss potential changes. A natural outgrowth of the regional meetings was the PDRN coordinator staff retreat that summer (July), during which the PDRN Coordinators, with practitioner input, decided to shift the focus for the upcoming year from outreach and information-sharing to practitioner research and developing practitioner-led study circles.

In 1999, the Practitioner Leaders worked predominantly on developing their own research projects. Aiding this process were four full-day training sessions the PDRN Coordinators conducted between November 1999 and June 2000. During the training, the Practitioner Leaders, as well as another practitioner from each of their states, met to identify their questions, develop data collection plans, and discuss data analysis. These projects dominated much of the Practitioner Leaders' work plan for the following year as well. Another major undertaking was the development and piloting of the first three study circle guides in the spring of 1999. In July of that year, Practitioner Leaders from all regions assembled once again for a national meeting in Tennessee that included NCSALL researchers and was run by the PDRN Coordinators. The recently formed Mid-Atlantic group's Practitioner Leaders from the states of New Jersey, New York, Delaware, and Pennsylvania were introduced. The meeting participants decided to craft state-specific work plans for the upcoming year rather than a generic work plan as they had in the prior year.

In 2000, the Southeast (May), Northeast (October), and Mid-Atlantic (November) regions met to assess their progress and to start looking ahead to the upcoming and last year of PDRN activities. In June, the PDRN coordinators, with the aid of a Practitioner Leader, devised a work plan for the final evaluation.

The major focus in 2001 centered on wrapping up the project, gathering data from past PDRN activities, and analyzing the lessons learned from the PDRN's five-year existence. The bulk of the data gathering occurred during the winter months and subsequently at the PDRN national meeting in May 2001, the last major PDRN meeting.

Development of PDRN: 1995–1996

The Proposal, 1995

The PDRN evolved from dissemination plans in the original NCSALL proposal written late in 1995. The proposal authors, who included Juliet Merrifield and Beth Bingman at the Center for Literacy Studies at the University of Tennessee and Cristine Smith, Silja Kallenbach, and Barbara Garner at World Education, Inc. in Boston, shared a commitment to involving practitioners in research. Both agencies had facilitated action research projects with adult educators in their states and were convinced that involving teachers directly in research would be a critical element of disseminating NCSALL's research findings effectively. The proposal described a "Practitioner Network for Dissemination."

> Groups of practitioners linked to the center's national research partnership institutions will participate in dissemination by learning about the results of research and development, conducting action research to apply these new theories, practices, and models, and then serving as practitioner experts who can further diffuse research results in their state. (p. 105)

The proposal anticipated that the network would begin with an action research project on assessment in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia, and practitioner research focused on one topic facilitated by the System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES), the state literacy resource center operated by World Education in Massachusetts. NCSALL planned to add several more institutional partners, each of which would be expected to build on the Tennessee and Massachusetts experiences to create their own practitioner networks. These plans were later modified because NCSALL didn't add another institutional partner, and funding was limited.

October 1996 Advisory Group Meeting

NCSALL was funded in August 1996. In October of that year, an advisory group of 16 people from the Northeast and Southeast met in Boston to consider how to establish the Practitioner Dissemination Network. The meeting affirmed the idea that NCSALL's work should be connected to the field through practitioners' involve-ment. Plans were developed for what was now called the Practitioner Dissemination and *Research* Network, based on the concept and belief that practitioners involved
in the network should also be engaged in research. Options such as having a revolving practitioner research fund or practitioner research training in various states were considered. The group ultimately agreed to choose practitioner representatives in several states who would serve as a link between NCSALL and practitioners in their states.

Year 1: 1996–1997

Connecting to States

In the October advisory group meeting, we decided to begin establishing the PDRN in the Northeast and Southeast, the two regions where NCSALL had partner institutions. Cristine Smith and Kim Stewart in the Northeast and Beth Bingman in the Southeast developed a job description for Practitioner Leaders and began to contact state adult education staff and/or state literacy resource centers in their regions. States were asked to help choose a Practitioner Leader and to name a representative from the state adult education agency and the state literacy resource

center (or whoever managed professional development for adult education in that state) to be part of a team to work with the Practitioner Leaders. Teams from each state were to come together in regional meetings in the spring of 1997. The state staff varied in their enthusiasm levels, but most had committed to the project by the spring meetings. Practitioner Leaders (three men and six women) were identified in Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine.

Practitioner Leader Job Description

The Practitioner Leader job was described to the state teams as a link between NCSALL and practitioners in their state. The initial job description is shown below.

Figure 1: Initial PDRN Practitioner Leader Job Description

Responsibilities:

- Disseminating information about NCSALL and its research projects
- Gathering input about research issues from practitioners and communicating this input to NCSALL
- Working with state professional development staff to plan activities to disseminate NCSALL research results
- Building a network of practitioner researchers in the state

Tasks:

- Attending the regional meeting
- Attending a national meeting
- Conducting a focus group of practitioners to generate input into NCSALL's research efforts
- Carrying out two activities to disseminate information about NCSALL
- Encouraging practitioner research in their state

Qualifications:

- Current work as an adult literacy practitioner
- Interest in leadership in the state
- Ability to travel within and outside the state
- Experience or interest in practitioner research
- Ability to be both self-directed and to work on a team

NCSALL would give each Practitioner Leader $2,000, a stipend for approximately 100 hours of work over the year. An additional $500 per state was allocated for travel and expenses (photocopies, phone, postage, etc.).

Regional Meetings, 1997

After the Practitioner Leaders were identified, state teams held regional meetings to plan the PDRN activities. The first regional meeting was held in March 1997 in the Southeast at the Center for Literacy Studies (CLS) in Knoxville, Tennessee. Teams from four states joined CLS and World Education staff for the day-long meeting. Each team talked at length about their state's adult education and staff development systems, and the Practitioner Leaders spoke about their experiences with practitioner research. They identified a variety of issues as possible research topics, including student retention, student recruitment, young students in ABE, teacher certification, workforce development, accountability, teacher use of research, and differences and similarities between ESOL and ABE. There was interest in disseminating research already completed as well as new research, a concern about how practitioners would connect with the academic researchers, question about the role of practitioners in research, and a strong interest in holding additional regional meetings.

The Northeast state teams met in Boston in May, with World Education staff facilitating. Teams from five states attended. Discussion focused on gaining information about NCSALL research, creating a means to disseminate information (e.g., Web pages, e-mail lists), and building connections within and between states. The group also discussed their plans to conduct focus groups.

The PDRN Focus Groups

In the summer of 1997, as part of NCSALL's work developing a comprehensive research agenda for the field of adult literacy, Practitioner Leaders conducted focus groups with practitioners in their states. The primary purpose was to solicit practitioners' input on the issues in their work that most concerned them and their thoughts on the priorities for adult literacy research. Beyond this, each state PDRN team used the meeting to gather information about how the PDRN should serve practitioners in their state.

In each state, the Practitioner Leaders, with the support of their state team, identified 5–10 practitioners who represented the diversity of state literacy programs (urban and rural, ESOL, volunteer programs, etc.). Cristine Smith prepared a facilitator's guide, and the PDRN focus groups gathered data on three related questions:

1. What issues concern practitioners in adult basic education?
2. How do practitioners see these concerns being addressed by current and future research?
3. What do practitioners see as the role of the PDRN in their states?

The focus groups were conducted in a structured fashion, usually with two people: one to facilitate and one to record. The Practitioner Leader wrote his or her own report on the focus group and also sent the tapes to NCSALL staff, who analyzed the data.

A total of 63 people from nine states participated in the focus groups. Their concerns focused on eight areas:

- Student participation: how to get people into class, keep them there, motivate them to learn, and deal with barriers to learning
- Program and policy issues, particularly program structure and funding
- Curriculum and instruction
- Student assessment and program performance measurement
- The needs of "special" students, including teens, the elderly, and those with learning difficulties
- Professional development and staff needs
- The impact of adult basic education on students' lives outside the classroom
- Working with a variety of learners in one class

Participants in these groups asked for research that:

- Addressed their areas of concern
- Has implications for practice
- Is conducted in a variety of sites in both rural and urban settings
- Includes practitioners in the research
- Is disseminated in a variety of ways
- Is reported concisely in "user-friendly" language

PDRN staff wrote a full report on the focus groups—Practitioners Speak: Contributing to a Research Agenda for Adult Basic Education (*NCSALL Reports #4*, 1998)—that was forwarded to the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) for use in developing a process for a national research agenda. The information in the report has informed NCSALL's dissemination efforts to this day.

National Practitioner Leader Meeting, 1997

The PDRN became an integral part of NCSALL when the new Practitioner Leaders met with NCSALL researchers in Boston in July 1997. The Practitioner Leaders from the Southeast and Northeast came together for a day of planning at World Education and then spent a day at the Harvard Graduate School of Education meeting with many of the NCSALL researchers and sharing ideas about their respective roles in research.

The day at World Education gave the Practitioner Leaders the opportunity to get acquainted and share plans for their work. They also reviewed the focus group findings about the PDRN's role. The group developed an extensive list of possible activities that could help them build the connections between research and practice that focus group participants had requested. Their ideas focused on:

- Providing information about NCSALL and its research through the variety of existing state conferences and meetings, newsletters, online discussions, and interactive television
- Supporting practitioner research through classes, institutes, interactive media, and research groups
- Building connections to NCSALL academic researchers by inviting researchers to conferences and setting up teacher research groups to read and respond to research

As detailed in the remainder of this chapter, most of the ideas expressed in this meeting were implemented over the four years of PDRN activities.

The group also discussed practitioner research and developed a working definition that they shared with the academic researchers the following day. They agreed that practitioner research is:

- Built around a question of practice
- A planned, systematic, and documented process
- Conducted by the practitioner, as a researcher
- Meant to improve practice
- Based on the data collected
- Documented (written)
- Based on reflection
- A process that usually involves students

Practitioner research was more important to some Practitioner Leaders (and states) than others, but almost all were involved in it to at least some extent, and practitioner research became a major focus as the PDRN developed.

The meeting at Harvard began with an introduction to the PDRN and the practitioner research definition, and was followed by participants briefly sharing their research interests and the connections they envisioned between NCSALL and practitioners. Several academic researchers looking for particular help with their research discussed their studies and then met with Practitioner Leaders interested in helping, for example, to identify sites or recruit interviewers. After this meeting, the PDRN staff created a document listing researchers' needs for collaboration. Several Practitioner Leaders provided assistance to researchers, such as helping to identify sites for data collection and recruiting other practitioners to help collect data.

The group also identified four kinds of researcher/Practitioner Leader connections that the PDRN might facilitate:

1. Sharing of ideas: Practitioners giving advice to NCSALL researchers, NCSALL researchers giving advice to practitioner researchers
2. Practitioners assisting with NCSALL research
3. Practitioners doing research in their own classrooms as part of a NCSALL study
4. Practitioners doing staff development or applying research results in conjunction with NCSALL studies

Each of these connections was made with some studies and with some Practitioner Leaders.

Although various projects and collaborations grew out of this meeting, it was also important as a way to establish face-to-face connections between practitioners and researchers. It seemed to help the Practitioner Leaders feel a real connection to NCSALL and, for at least some researchers, it provided an important connection to the field.

Year 2: 1997–1998

In fall 1997, the Practitioner Leaders began to put the PDRN into place in their states. They established relationships with other practitioners and their state's ABE staff. Some also worked with NCSALL researchers.

Practitioner Leaders' Action Plans

In consultation with the PDRN Coordinators, the Practitioner Leaders established an "action plan" outlining their work in four areas:

- Disseminating information about NCSALL at state meetings and conferences and through newsletters
- Making connections between NCSALL researchers and practitioners
- Supporting practitioner research on topics connected to NCSALL research
- Disseminating results of NCSALL research

In this first full year of the PDRN, with much of the NCSALL research in its initial stages, the Practitioner Leaders focused on disseminating information about NCSALL. They made or organized nearly 30 presentations about NCSALL and wrote 20 articles that were published in state adult education newsletters. A few Practitioner Leaders participated in some kind of practitioner research, and several established connections with NCSALL researchers, either by organizing opportunities for researchers to speak in their states or by helping to identify people and programs to participate in NCSALL studies.

Growth of the PDRN

In March 1998, Patsy Medina from the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University (like World Education and the Center for Literacy Studies, a partner in NCSALL) became the Mid-Atlantic PDRN Coordinator. She began contacting adult education professional development staff in the Mid-Atlantic states in the summer of 1998, communicating with the state agencies in Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

Regional Meetings, 1998

A second round of regional meetings took place in 1998. The state teams were in touch with their coordinator throughout the year through meetings and conference calls. The regional meetings gave the teams the opportunity to meet face-to-face and

talk about their work. Practitioner Leaders and a few state representatives attended the meetings.

The Southeast team met in May 1998. The group reported on activities that most satisfied them: a presentation about NCSALL to state ABE supervisors, a presentation at a state literacy conference, the focus group, publishing an article in a statewide newspaper, and meetings of a practitioner research group. They expressed some frustrations about their lack of connection to the rest of NCSALL and, in some states, the difficulty in knowing what was happening in their state. Distance from one another was a challenge in the Southeast states. The Practitioner Leaders also proposed various projects on which they might work jointly—research on how practitioners get information, for example.

The Northeast team met in July 1998. They discussed what had worked well and what needed improvement, and made plans for the next year of the PDRN in their region, including adding practitioner research conducted by the Practitioner Leaders. Some of the Practitioner Leaders voiced frustration that their task description was vague enough that they weren't sure if they were "on the right track" within their states. This indicated the need for more structure within the job as well as more support from the PDRN Coordinators.

Staff Retreat

The PDRN staff held a two-day retreat in the summer of 1998 to evaluate the first year of the PDRN and plan for the next phase. The team reviewed their vision for the PDRN and recognized that it was, in fact, a research and development effort. They tried to identify realistic approaches the PDRN could take to have an impact on practice. They concluded that they should focus on ways the Practitioner Leaders could connect more directly with the NCSALL research. The staff team proposed that in 1998–1999 the Practitioner Leaders would all take part in practitioner research and also would facilitate study circles for practitioners in their respective states. Study circles bring together 8–9 practitioners to read NCSALL research, analyze its relevance to their work, and plan how to apply it to their classrooms and programs. Both the practitioner research and the study circles would address a topic focused on NCSALL research. Practitioner Leaders would also continue some general dissemination about NCSALL but would focus on specific studies of interest to them, rather than all NCSALL studies.

In the first year of the PDRN, the Practitioner Leaders had developed connections and a sense of themselves as leaders. In the second year, they would be asked to connect concretely with the research NCSALL was conducting. Rather than

trying to learn about and disseminate information about all of the NCSALL studies, Practitioner Leaders would focus on one or two NCSALL research areas and learn about them in depth, potentially making it easier to provide more and better information on these topics within their states. In other words, "more depth, less breadth" was a strategy shift that the PDRN Coordinators envisioned for the Practitioner Leaders' energy and activities.

Year 3: 1998–1999

In the fall of 1998, two new Practitioner Leaders were named in the Northeast, replacing two of the original group who were unable to continue for personal reasons, and Judy Hofer replaced Kim Stewart as the Northeast region's PDRN Coordinator when Kim entered graduate school. In the Southeast, the same Practitioner Leaders started in the fall, but by spring, one Practitioner Leader decided that he did not have the support he needed from his state, and another left for personal reasons.

Instituting the PDRN in the Mid-Atlantic states proved difficult, primarily because identifying the appropriate people on the state level was a lengthy process. In two states, the administrative structures were in transition. Nonetheless, in fall 1998, state officials from Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania met at Rutgers University. They discussed the PDRN's goals as well as ideas for regional collaboration. During the winter, each state developed its own process for selecting a Practitioner Leader. By late spring, Practitioner Leaders from each of the states had been identified.

In Year 3, the Practitioner Leaders continued to disseminate information about NCSALL, particularly in the Northeast, but they spent most PDRN time on practitioner research and study circles.

The Practitioner Research Project

In initiating the Practitioner Research project, the PDRN staff hoped to:

- Establish closer connections between NCSALL researchers and practitioners
- Strengthen Practitioner Leaders' knowledge about a particular area of NCSALL research
- Build the capacity for practitioner research in PDRN states

Regional practitioner research groups, consisting of the Practitioner Leaders and another practitioner researcher from each PDRN state, were trained to conduct their own classroom or program research. The regional groups all addressed research

questions linked to the same NCSALL topic. The PDRN Coordinator in that region facilitated the groups.

PDRN Coordinators contacted state team members and asked that each state name and support with a small stipend a practitioner to be part of a regional practitioner research group. Most states were willing to do so. In both the Northeast and Southeast (the Mid-Atlantic practitioner research began later and was organized differently, as described in Year 4), the Practitioner Leaders chose to address the NCSALL research topic of learner motivation and persistence: What helps adult literacy students stay in programs long enough to reach their educational goals? The coordinators designed three (later expanded to four) day-long training sessions, building on the model Cristine Smith and Judy Hofer had developed as part of the NCSALL Staff Development Study. The teams met, identified their questions, developed data collection plans, and discussed data analysis. Between team meetings, the practitioners conducted research in their own classes or programs. At the national PDRN meeting held in the summer of 1999, the Practitioner Leaders reported on their research.

Three Study Circles Developed and Piloted

The practitioner research was one way the PDRN helped connect research and practice. Developing and conducting study circles was another. Practitioner Leaders facilitated three-session, nine-hour study circles of 8–10 practitioners from their state, in which practitioners read the results of NCSALL research (in the form of reports, *Focus on Basics* articles, or other publications) and other relevant material, and discussed the research results and how to apply them in their own classrooms or programs.

The PDRN staff developed guides for study circles on:

- Performance accountability, based on a report by Juliet Merrifield
- Health and literacy, based on work by Rima Rudd
- Program structure, based on work by Victoria Purcell-Gates

The Practitioner Leaders chose one of these topics and recruited practitioners in their states to participate in the study circles. Practitioner Leaders conducted 6 study circles in Year 3; in following years, 13 more study circles were conducted. The study circles proved to be an effective way to engage practitioners in considering the implications of research findings.

PDRN National Meeting in Maryville, Tennessee

The second national PDRN meeting was held at Maryville College in Knoxville, Tennessee, in July 1999. Four new Practitioner Leaders from New Jersey, New York, Delaware, and Pennsylvania joined the Practitioner Leaders from the Southeast and the Northeast. Also attending were NCSALL researchers Hal Beder, John Comings, Rima Rudd, and John Strucker, and the PDRN Coordinators.

Over the course of the two-day meeting, they examined the PDRN's history by constructing a timeline and looked at accomplishments on the state, regional, national, and individual levels. Accomplishments they identified included:

- A wider recognition of NCSALL
- More focus on research at state conferences
- Recognition of the PDRN as an innovative dissemination model by OERI
- A feeling among the Practitioner Leaders of having moved outside the classroom in their connections to and knowledge of adult education

Among "wished for" accomplishments were better communication between states, better timing and delivery of needed materials (such as study circle guides), and more systematic partnerships between practitioners and researchers.

The Maryville meeting helped build partnerships with the researchers who were present, as the Practitioner Leaders and the NCSALL researchers shared their work. The participants at the meeting also revisited and clarified the goals and objectives of the PDRN, as shown in the following figure.

Figure 2: Goal and Objectives of the PDRN

Goal of the PDRN

The goal of the PDRN is to improve practice, influence policy, and build knowledge by creating and supporting systematic partnerships between practitioners and researchers.

Objectives

1. Organizing and supporting practitioners to be involved in research by:
   - Working as co-researchers
   - Doing practitioner research (connected to NCSALL topics and researcher)
   - Field testing models or interventions
   - Being a critical reader and providing feedback on research results
2. Disseminating information, through established and new or innovative methods, about NCSALL research processes, results, and experiences in ways that have an impact on practice
3. Ensuring that critical problems in the field are addressed by developing and facilitating ways for practitioners and researchers to jointly develop an agenda for research
4. Assisting NCSALL research implementation and activities
5. Developing leadership in the field
6. Engaging with policymakers
7. Supporting researchers to work in partnership with practitioners

The objectives derived from this meeting differed from those resulting from the initial advisory committee meeting. The meeting ended with a decision that in Year 4 of the PDRN, Practitioner Leaders would meet with their state teams to tailor a work plan based on the revised objectives rather than following a more standard plan for use by all states, as in Year 3.

Year 4: 1999–2000

Continuation in the Southeast and Northeast

During the fall of 1999, the PDRN Coordinators met with each Practitioner Leader in their regions, together (whenever possible) with state team members, to develop a tailored work plan for the Practitioner Leader for the coming year. The work plan could be based on the interests of the Practitioner Leader and aligned with the state's current professional development focus, but it had to include at least three components: (1) engagement in some in-depth work that connected the Practitioner Leader with NCSALL research and researchers; (2) outreach; and (3) professional development based on NCSALL research findings to practitioners in the state. Although work plans varied from state to state, most Practitioner Leaders conducted some type of study circle, made a presentation at a state conference, or did other outreach activities, and engaged in practitioner research or facilitated other practitioners' research on a topic related to NCSALL. Each Practitioner Leader posted a final work plan on the PDRN listserv so activities could be shared across regions. When each activity was completed, Practitioner Leaders were asked to post some type of report on the listserv, outlining what they had done and how it had proceeded; this posting also served as the deliverable on their contract.

Developing and Piloting New Study Circles

We developed two more study circle guides based on new research findings from the Learner Persistence and Adult Multiple Intelligences studies. Andrea Parella, one of the researchers in the Learner Persistence Study, created drafts of the two guides, which Judy Hofer and Pam Meader developed further. Pam, the Practitioner Leader from Maine, piloted both study circles. On the basis of Pam's feedback, these two guides were revised for future use by other Practitioner Leaders.

Practitioner Leaders David Hayes and Tom Smith wanted to run study circles on topics other than those already created, so they developed their own guides. These study circles were required to use research on the selected topics. David Hayes created a guide on standards and the Equipped for the Future (EFF) initiative, with assistance from Brenda Bell (one of the principal researchers involved in EFF) and Janet Isserlis (the state literacy resource center coordinator from David's state of Rhode Island). Tom Smith created two guides, one on goal-setting (as a specific strategy for addressing learner persistence recommended by the Learner Persistence Study) and another on the increase in the number of youths in ABE programs. For the guide on goal-setting, Tom worked closely with Sondra Cuban, a researcher on student persistence in library programs, for help with the content. Northeast region

PDRN Coordinator Judy Hofer provided design assistance. For the second guide, "Youthification of adult basic education programs," he drew heavily on Elizabeth Hayes' research published in NCSALL's *The Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy.* Although the process for creating these guides was time consuming for both of these Practitioner Leaders, they found it rewarding. They felt freedom in not being tied to a particular guide someone else had created for their use. They felt they gained more knowledge on the topic and were more confident in their role as facilitators. Thus, they felt better able to meet the participating teachers' specific needs and interests.

New Model in the Mid-Atlantic

The Mid-Atlantic region Practitioner Leaders and PDRN Coordinator met for the first time at the national meeting in Tennessee in the summer of 1999. In light of the revised PDRN objectives, participants from this region (including Hal Beder, Principal Investigator for NCSALL research at Rutgers University), decided to work as co-researchers with Rutgers researchers in a collaborative manner. Hal Beder and Patsy Medina (also the region's PDRN Coordinator) were in the midst of analyzing data and deriving findings from the NCSALL Classroom Dynamics Study and saw the region's Practitioner Leaders as helpful to the process. The Practitioner Leaders would not only provide feedback to the university researchers about the findings, but also conduct micro-research on a topic directly related to classroom interactions in ABE classes. Hence, the Practitioner Leaders and other practitioner researchers they recruited had very direct and ongoing contact with university researchers. In this region, Practitioner Leaders were instructed to conduct practitioner inquiry on classroom dynamics rather than on another topic that may have been more relevant to their practice.

The region's university researchers felt they needed more than the Practitioner Leader in each state to conduct practitioner research using the findings of the Classroom Dynamics Study. They believed the Practitioner Leaders needed to collaborate with others doing the same type of research. Therefore, research project money was allocated to allow the Practitioner Leaders to identify up to two practitioners in their states with whom they would collaborate. Only three additional practitioners chose to participate, two from Pennsylvania and one from New York. Those practitioners, as well as some of the Practitioner Leaders in this region, were also trained to collect data for the ESOL Classroom Dynamics Study. They were provided with a $1,000 stipend to collect data and conduct their own practitioner inquiry projects.

During 1999–2000, four regional meetings were held at Rutgers. All of the Practitioner Leaders attended, as did the three additional practitioner researchers.

Aside from learning about practitioner research, they were provided with samples of the Classroom Dynamics Study field notes so they could take part in the data analysis process. In addition, they were given drafts of the final report, which they helped write and edit at times. These processes allowed the participants to think about how the findings were related to their classrooms and, based on their thinking, to identify a topic to research in their own classrooms.

How the Data Collectors were Trained

The Practitioner Leaders from New York and Pennsylvania who opted to collect data for the ESOL study were provided with field notes from the Classroom Dynamics Study. They were also given reading assignments about data collection (Sharon Merriam's *Qualitative Case Studies*). In addition, they were given the study protocol. A two-hour discussion/presentation about these items constituted the formal training for data collectors. The PDRN Coordinator also conducted two informal training sessions: one in Pennsylvania, the other at a regional meeting. The PDRN Coordinator provided follow-up consultations with data collectors by phone.

Practitioner Research Projects' Connection to the Classroom Dynamics Study

Rather than informing the Classroom Dynamics Study, the practitioner research projects became separate pieces that did not factor into the research findings, for the following reasons:

- The Practitioner Leaders conducted their studies while the university researchers were still analyzing data. Hence, the Classroom Dynamics Study could not draw on findings that did not yet exist.
- Even if there had been findings, the questions of many of the Practitioner Leaders' projects were too general. To connect to the study in a meaningful manner, questions would have needed to be more specific.
- The Mid-Atlantic region PDRN Coordinator was not sure how to critique the questions that Practitioner Leaders identified to guide their practitioner research. She wanted to ensure they focused on research questions important to their practice, yet she knew the questions and projects they chose were only minimally connected to the formal NCSALL study.

The one project that could have been truly connected to the Classroom Dynamics Study was based on a finding not highlighted in the final research report. However, the work of the Practitioner Leaders and practitioner researchers connected to the Classroom Dynamics Study were useful to the university researchers. In the fifth year, when the university researchers had developed a

typology of classroom practice based on their research findings, they shared it first with the Practitioner Leaders, who examined data on which the typology was based and discussed whether the university researchers' categories were appropriate. Their opinions informed the final derivation of that typology. In addition, the New Jersey Practitioner Leader developed a Web page for practitioner use that includes a section on the typology. Hence, although the collaboration did not proceed as expected, it was somewhat successful.

Rutgers University is continuing its relationship with the Mid-Atlantic participants from Pennsylvania. The Practitioner Leader from Pennsylvania recruited two practitioner researchers. All three became data collectors for the ESOL Classroom Dynamics Study. At Rutgers University, Ujwala Samant and Patsy Medina, the primary researchers of the ESOL study, still collaborate with the practitioners from Pennsylvania. They have met once since the PDRN ended to code data. As coding schemes evolve and findings emerge, the university researchers continue to confer by phone with the practitioners.

Proposal for the Second Phase of NCSALL (2001–2006)

In early 2000, NCSALL's funder, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), asked NCSALL to submit a proposal for another five years of funding. The PDRN staff met in April 2000 and began to develop plans for the second phase of NCSALL. Although they generally agreed the PDRN had been successful, it had not reached most states. NCSALL was committed to connecting research and practice nationally. Based on the experience of the PDRN as a research and development effort of NCSALL's first five years, the PDRN staff felt it was important to make a transition to a larger system for connecting research and practice that would serve all the research in adult literacy, not just NCSALL's. Therefore, the PDRN staff decided to propose establishing a national system to connect practice and research, drawing on the experience and lessons learned from the PDRN. In the second five years of NCSALL, the PDRN would transform into a research dissemination system that would serve the adult basic education and literacy field as a whole. Thus, specific monies were not set aside in the refunding proposal to continue the PDRN in its original 14 states. Although the PDRN would not be supported as a research and development project, the PDRN staff hoped that states in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Southeast would be able to maintain at least some of the PDRN work.

NCSALL's additional five years of funding included some funds for this new initiative, eventually titled Connecting Practice, Policy and Research (CPPR). During the proposal review process, representatives from both NIFL and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE)

agreed to work with NCSALL during the next five years to support the CPPR initiative's development.

Year 5: 2000–2001

Scope of Work for the Final Year

The PDRN staff, along with one of the Practitioner Leaders from the Northeast region, met in a retreat in June 2000 to plan the final year of the PDRN. Year 5 was designated as a time to finish practitioner research and study circle projects, as well as to evaluate the PDRN. The Practitioner Leaders continued to conduct some study circles, and a few finished their own research projects. Most did some outreach within their states. Several took an active role in the PDRN evaluation, and all contributed. The evaluation process is described in Chapter 3 of this report. A national meeting held in May 2001 to analyze the data for the evaluation was the final "official" PDRN activity.

Summit Focus Groups

In addition to finishing regular PDRN work in Year 5, the PDRN participants also contributed to a national initiative. In February 2000, NCSALL, NIFL, and OVAE sponsored a National Literacy Summit, held in Washington, D.C. The Summit created a draft action plan and asked for feedback from the adult literacy field. The PDRN helped provide feedback by sponsoring focus groups conducted by Practitioner Leaders in Maine, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Virginia, using a methodology the PDRN staff had developed. The PDRN staff analyzed data from these focus groups and submitted a report on the findings to the Summit Working Group. The report, *Teachers' Recommendations for the Adult Literacy Summit Action Agenda: A Report of Five Focus Groups,* can be found on the NCSALL Web site at http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/research/op_pdrn.pdf.

Regional Meetings, 2000

The regional meetings held in the final year focused on reflection and evaluation of the PDRN project. The PDRN Coordinators designed a common format for these meetings, which was adapted in each region, depending on the participants.

In the Southeast, Practitioner Leaders and state literacy resource center staff from the four states met in Knoxville in November. The Practitioner Leaders presented their work, and the group then divided into small groups of state team members and Practitioner Leaders to discuss the PDRN's impact and their

recommendations for continued work to connect research and practice. Their evaluation of the PDRN was positive, and their recommendations included:

- Focus on study circles for policymakers as well as practitioners
- Combine study circles and practitioner research
- Maintain NCSALL's relationship with current Practitioner Leaders
- Hold institutes to examine the implications of a cluster of findings
- Do an article in *The Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy* on research to practice efforts in other fields
- Present the PDRN model at the ProNet conference

The Northeast Practitioner Leaders met with their PDRN Coordinator in October, but state team members were unable to attend. Practitioner Leaders reported on their previous work and planned participation in the PDRN evaluation process. The group also developed a list of suggestions for developing a "research into practice" system. These included:

- Use a business model (market research) to promote the importance of connecting product (research) to consumer interest and need (teacher and student realities, interests, and problems)
- Ground research in practitioners' and students' needs and interests
- Negotiate a research agenda with practitioners to expand practitioners' interests
- Create research to practice products in collaboration with practitioners to insure relevancy

The Mid-Atlantic team met in November with Practitioner Leaders from Delaware and Pennsylvania and state representatives from Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The state team members believed the PDRN had not been in existence long enough for them to evaluate it and expressed frustration at the PDRN's elimination. The group's suggestions included:

- Create opportunities for Practitioner Leaders to serve on NCSALL advisory boards
- Create opportunities for teachers to be involved in research in NCSALL's planned labsites
- Share findings of NCSALL research with practitioners and state agencies from the Mid-Atlantic states

The Final National Meeting

The final national PDRN meeting was held in Massachusetts in May 2001. Ten Practitioner Leaders, the PDRN staff, and three additional NCSALL researchers attended the two-day meeting. The agenda centered on presenting and analyzing the PDRN evaluation data, and the results of that analysis are reported in the rest of this report. The meeting was also a celebration and affirmation of the important role that the PDRN had played in participants' lives. The group expressed sadness about ending the PDRN. They also voiced a commitment to continuing the PDRN efforts in their respective states when possible and encouraged building a new national system connecting research and practice based on the lessons learned from the PDRN experience.

CHAPTER 3: EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

As the PDRN was a research and development effort of NCSALL, it was important to determine, within the financial limits of the initiative's funding, whether and to what extent the PDRN was effective in connecting research and practice during its five-year existence. As we moved into the second phase of NCSALL (2001–2006), we made plans during the grant negotiations with our funder to work with other organizations and agencies in the field of adult literacy (such as NIFL, OVAE, and the National Coalition for Literacy) to develop a better system for connecting research and practice on a national scale. As discussed in our proposal for the second five years of NCSALL, we wanted to work toward developing a national CPPR initiative that would provide mechanisms for all adult literacy research (not just NCSALL's research) to connect with practice, primarily through professional development and policy problem-solving activities organized at the state level. Some of the lessons we learned during our PDRN work would be important in designing such an initiative for the field.

Therefore, we felt it important to work in a participatory way with the PDRN states and the Practitioner Leaders to assess and document:

- The scope of our work during the PDRN
- The impact of the PDRN on practitioners, programs, states, researchers, and NCSALL
- The lessons learned about connecting research and practice that would inform a larger, national effort for the field as a whole

In June 2000, PDRN staff members Cristine Smith, Beth Bingman, Judy Hofer, Patsy Medina, and Sam Gordenstein and a Practitioner Leader representative (Pam Meader from Maine) met to design a participatory evaluation that would take place during the final year of NCSALL's first phase (August 2000 to July 2001). Everyone involved in the PDRN, including researchers, would play a role in the evaluation by helping to generate data about the PDRN's effectiveness. As we had no funding for an outside evaluator and part of the PDRN's task was to bring practitioners into the research process, it seemed an ideal situation for a participatory evaluation, one in which the Practitioner Leaders would play a key role in helping to generate, collect, organize, and analyze the data.

We first generated a series of draft questions that would drive the evaluation. We sent them to the Practitioner Leaders for feedback, and they were finalized as the questions presented here.

Figure 3: Overall Evaluation Questions

1. What did the PDRN do (the scope and description of its activities)?
2. What were the most important factors that supported and hindered the PDRN in its work?
3. How did the PDRN have an impact on the practice and development of:
   - Practitioner Leaders?
   - Practitioners and programs (and who they were)?
   - State professional development systems?
   - NCSALL researchers?
   - NCSALL?
4. What recommendations for connecting research and practice can be derived from the PDRN research and development effort?

To answer these questions, we proposed three types of data:

- Information ("stories") about the scope of the PDRN's activities, including number of conference presentations, newsletter articles, study circles, practitioner research projects, and other outreach activities conducted by Practitioner Leaders, and an estimate of the number of practitioners who had attended or been reached through these activities
- Information about the results or impact of these activities on practitioners, programs, and states, through collection of Practitioner Leaders reports over the years and analysis of common "themes" arising in such reports
- Information about the experience of all who participated in or were connected with PDRN (Practitioner Leaders, coordinators, researchers, state team members), the barriers and supports to the effective operating of the PDRN, and how the PDRN affected them personally

From September 2000 through April 2001, Practitioner Leaders each assumed different responsibilities for collecting and organizing the data. For example, Pam Meader, the Practitioner Leader from Maine, sorted through all PDRN reports over the years and developed a summary of PDRN activities. David Hayes, the Rhode Island Practitioner Leader, sifted through all available reports for emerging themes about outcomes from practitioner research and interviewed some of the state team staff about the PDRN. Sue Barton in Virginia examined all of the study circle reports to generate a list of outcome themes.

The heart of the data for the evaluation was the "stories" written by all Practitioner Leaders, coordinators, and researchers who had been involved with the PDRN. We first generated a list of questions during regional meetings; these questions would guide the Practitioner Leaders and coordinators in writing 3–5 page "stories" about their experience working in the PDRN. The final set of questions used to guide people in writing their stories is listed in the figure below.

Figure 4: Guiding Questions for "Stories"

1. What were the most rewarding and valuable aspects of being a Practitioner Leader (or PDRN Coordinator)? What were the high points and successes? Why?

2. What were the most difficult, frustrating or unworkable aspects of being a Practitioner Leader (or PDRN Coordinator)? What were the low points and challenges? Why?

3. What effect has participation in the PDRN had on me personally and my practice?
   - What was the evolution I saw within myself?
   - How did my view of my role in the PDRN evolve over time?

4. What impact, if any, did my work as a Practitioner Leader have on:
   - My program
   - Practitioners outside my program
   - Students
   - State teams
   - Researchers

5. What helped me to do the best job possible? What made it difficult to do the best job possible?

6. What suggestions do I have for continuing the kind of work the PDRN has begun?

Susan Bubp of New Hampshire took responsibility for collecting, editing, and helping Practitioner Leaders revise their stories. Judy Hofer helped the other PDRN Coordinators generate their stories, and Cristine Smith worked with three researchers (John Comings, Rima Rudd, and Silja Kallenbach) to generate theirs.

The third and final national PDRN meeting was scheduled for May 11–12, 2001. The primary purpose of the two-day meeting was to examine and analyze all of the above data and information, and to reach conclusions and recommendations about the best ways to connect practice and research to guide NCSALL's future efforts to develop the national CPPR initiative. All of the data (numbers, themes, and stories), along with the history of the PDRN presented in the second chapter of this report, were sent to the Practitioner Leaders, PDRN Coordinators, and researchers 10 days before the meeting.

The coordinators generated a meeting agenda that included carefully reading and analyzing the stories, themes, and numbers and tying findings to each of the overall evaluation questions. The second day included an update on NCSALL's future work and generation of recommendations based on the findings from the PDRN evaluation, to better connect research and practice in the field of adult basic education.

The product of the evaluation is this report.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter we discuss the findings from the PDRN evaluation and address three of our four evaluation questions:

- What did the PDRN do (the scope and description of its activities)?
- What were the most important factors that supported and hindered the PDRN in its work?
- How did the PDRN have an impact on:

  The practice and development of Practitioner Leaders?
  The practice and development of practitioners and programs?
  The practice and development of state professional development systems?
  The practice and development of NCSALL researchers?
  The practice and development of NCSALL?

The first section of this chapter describes the activities of the Practitioner Leaders in conducting outreach, professional development, and practitioner research. The data for this section come primarily from the reports the Practitioner Leaders filed. The second section examines the positive and negative factors that affected the work of the PDRN, the things that helped build the network and supported the activities of the Practitioner Leaders and the things that got in the way. The third section discusses the impact of the PDRN for Practitioner Leaders and their students and programs; the impact on NCSALL and NCSALL researchers; and the impact beyond NCSALL on the practitioners and states where the PDRN was active. The findings in the second and third sections are based primarily on data from the reflective "stories" written for this evaluation by Practitioner Leaders, the PDRN staff, and several other NCSALL researchers.

What Did the PDRN Do?

This section is based on data analysis conducted by Pam Meader. She used data from Practitioner Leaders' reports on work they had completed.

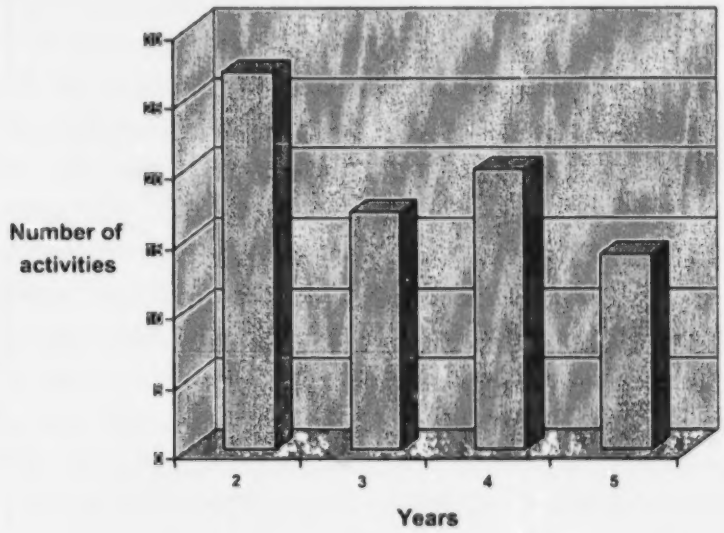
The active work of the PDRN occurred over a four-year span, and, in this short time, a great deal was accomplished. Practitioner Leaders led nearly 100 activities or events, including conference presentations, study circles, and workshops. The Practitioner Leaders' work can be divided into four categories:

1. Outreach and dissemination activities: telling about research
2. Research assistance activities: helping with research
3. Professional development activities: helping others learn from research
4. Practitioner research activities: doing research

Outreach/Dissemination Activities: Telling about Research

In Year 2 of the PDRN, the Practitioner Leaders' primary task was to provide information about the existence and work of NCSALL to practitioners in their states. This outreach was done either in face-to-face presentations at state conferences and other venues or through articles in state adult education newsletters. Many Practitioner Leaders shared information about NCSALL research at their various state conferences, and others held workshops or sharing sessions for specific groups. The greatest number of outreach activities occurred in the first full year of the PDRN (Year 2), probably because Practitioner Leaders' time was spent on other activities in following years. Figure 5 demonstrates that outreach peaked at 27 events for that year, even though only nine PDRN states were active, whereas only 14 events were held in the final year.

Figure 5: Presentations and Workshops (all regions)



Outreach activities included presentations, workshops, and newsletter articles. There were 78 presentations and workshops over four years; more outreach took place at conferences versus workshops or sharing sessions. The conference presentations were met with generally enthusiastic responses:

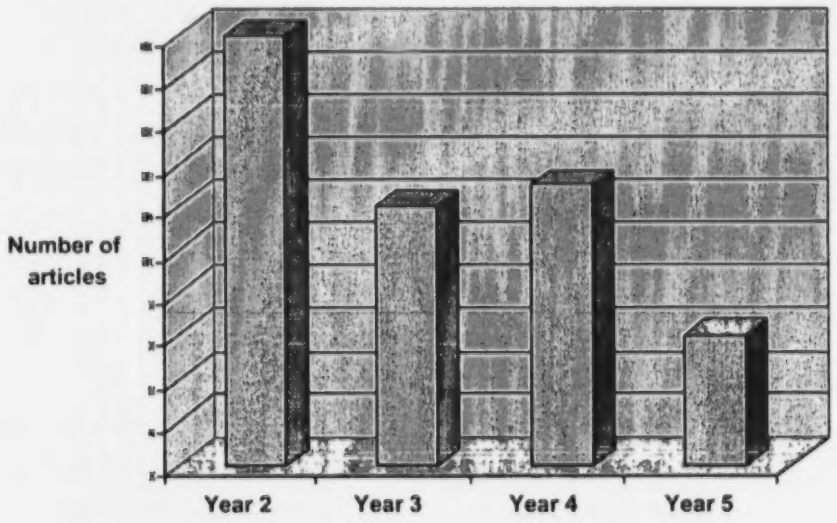
> I was amazed by the enthusiastic response to research projects.
> **Maine**

> People love to hear about the research going on and have contact with a researcher.
> **New Hampshire**

> Teachers are so needy for help in their work. Everyone has been so eager to hear that someone is doing research. Also, so many have been willing to help with the research.
> **Tennessee**

In addition to presenting information verbally at conferences, Practitioner Leaders also used the written word to inform their peers. Many Practitioner Leaders wrote for their state newsletters or shared information on e-mail discussion lists. The first year produced the most articles: 20 different articles or pieces of text appeared, with a total of 52 articles written over the four years.

Figure 6: Newsletter Articles (all regions)



Although some practitioners reported that the "newsletter was an effective means of reaching people" (Virginia), others were frustrated by the lack of available material for articles. There was "the need for fresh material" (Rhode Island).

The Practitioner Leaders were active in conducting outreach about NCSALL, but they also felt some frustration at the lack of research findings in the early years. They found themselves describing research without results. It also proved difficult to keep the Practitioner Leaders current on the activities of the NCSALL researchers in a timely way. These problems were alleviated to some extent as research reports were published and articles about the research appeared in the NCSALL publication *Focus on Basics*. But it was not possible for Practitioner Leaders to stay informed about all the research being conducted.

Research Assistance: Helping with Research

At the first national meeting of the PDRN, held at Harvard in July 1997, several researchers talked about ways the Practitioner Leaders could assist with their research. Although helping with research was not as significant a part of the PDRN work as many expected, there were at least two instances in which Practitioner Leaders assisted NCSALL researchers by identifying research sites and, in one instance, by identifying local interviewers and serving as an interviewer herself.

Practitioner Leaders were also assisting with research when they conducted focus group interviews, first for the research agenda process in 1997 and later as part of the National Literacy Summit project. These are described in more detail in Chapter 2. In both of these projects, the Practitioner Leaders were trained to collect data using focus group processes the staff designed. In the first project, they also were involved in initial data analysis and wrote reports on the focus groups they conducted. For the Summit project, the staff analyzed the data. These projects gave the Practitioner Leaders some research experience and brought the viewpoints of other practitioners into national dialogues.

Professional Development: Helping Others Learn about Research

Although PDRN outreach tended to provide general information about NCSALL and the research that was planned or underway, the study circles involved practitioners in reading and engaging with the results of NCSALL research in a direct way.

Beginning in Year 2, Practitioner Leaders began to facilitate various study circles based on the current NCSALL research. These study circles were nine-hour, multi-session professional development activities in which 8–10 teachers, program

directors, or counselors came together to read and discuss research and then to think about how the findings were relevant to their classroom or program situations. The PDRN staff developed study circle guides for five topics, and Practitioner Leaders developed some of their own (See Chapter 2). The peak of study circle participation occurred in Year 3, when 68 individuals took part in study circles.

Figure 7: Study Circles Conducted (all regions and years)

Study circle topic	Number of times
Performance Accountability	5
Program Structure	5
Adult Multiple Intelligences	3
Learner Motivation	2
Health Literacy	2
Other	2

Many Practitioner Leaders viewed study circles as more effective than conference sessions in involving practitioners in learning about NCSALL's research.

> A greater impact is seen by working with small groups of practitioners for an extended period of time as opposed to addressing large groups of practitioners.
>
> **Kristin Tiedeman, Practitioner Leader**

> They have raised practitioner awareness of key issues, created opportunities for meaningful dialogue among colleagues, and resulted in the development of products, which have impacted research as well as practice.
>
> **David Hayes, Practitioner Leader**

> Giving teachers an opportunity to get together and share experiences and perspectives is a benefit of the "research to practice" initiative. Through this exercise, teachers came away with helpful classroom teaching strategies and perspectives. Allowing teachers the opportunity to take time out to study and digest research and then talk about the research with coworkers is a plus. . . . Teachers increased their awareness of the effect that program structure and classroom structure had on their students. This awareness created an impact on the program and the classroom because of the changes teachers made in their approach. Their enthusiasm flowed over into the classroom and was contagious to the students.
>
> **Sue Barton, Practitioner Leader**

> The project has engaged a small number of practitioners in study circles and investigations into topics chosen by NCSALL . . . while the study circle is a useful vehicle for sustained thought, reflection, and discussion, because of its intensity and the time commitment it demands, relatively few practitioners are able to commit to the process.
>
> **Rhode Island State Team Member**

The study circles created opportunities for practitioners to discuss research over an extended period of time. Practitioner Leaders reported that teachers particularly valued the opportunities to talk together and that they were able to plan ways to implement what they had discussed in their classes and programs. They connected the research they had learned about to their own practice.

Practitioner Research

Practitioner research was the PDRN activity that made the most direct connection between research and practice. Although the audience was smaller, the impact on each Practitioner Leader and, in some instances, the practitioner peer was great. Doing practitioner research helped bridge the gap between researcher and practitioner and made the research relevant and applicable.

During the first national PDRN meeting, practitioner research was discussed and defined. At least one Practitioner Leader initiated a practitioner research group in Year 2 under the auspices of her state team, with some support from the PDRN. In Year 3, practitioner research was systematized, and the PDRN staff developed a training model that was used in the Southeast and Northeast. In addition to the Practitioner Leaders from those regions, the PDRN states subsidized the participation of four additional teachers from the Southeast and five from the Northeast. All addressed questions regarding some aspect of learner persistence, but topics varied greatly, including surveys about attitude, instructional interventions, and exploration of goal-setting processes.

In Year 4, many Practitioner Leaders in the Northeast and the Southeast again conducted practitioner research, but the training was individualized. In the Mid- Atlantic, region the Practitioner Leaders and three other teachers took part in a collaborative practitioner research project with the Rutgers study of classroom dynamics as described in Chapter 2.

Although practitioner research was not as common as other activities (with 33 research projects), the direct change in the classrooms for some of those who participated was immediate.

> The most rewarding aspect of being a practitioner leader was my involvement in practitioner research. . . . I was able to co-facilitate a group of instructors and administrators in the research process. It was very fulfilling to see the instructors grow as teachers and people during this process. Watching these instructors get excited about what they were learning was very rewarding.
>
> **Kristin Tiedeman, Practitioner Leader**

> Prior to this project, I could not have stated that writing and basic computer skills were the most important elements of [our] program. And though I have made considerable changes in both these areas, it is clear that I need to focus even more attention on these two skills.
>
> **Tom Smith, Practitioner Leader**

> Although the study [Kate's classroom goal-setting study] needs more time, I want to continue to work on this question. From what the students have reported, weekly goal setting along with learning based on interest may be useful and may provide motivation for them to continue the pursuit of their long-term goal.
>
> **Kate Rosenfield, Practitioner Researcher**

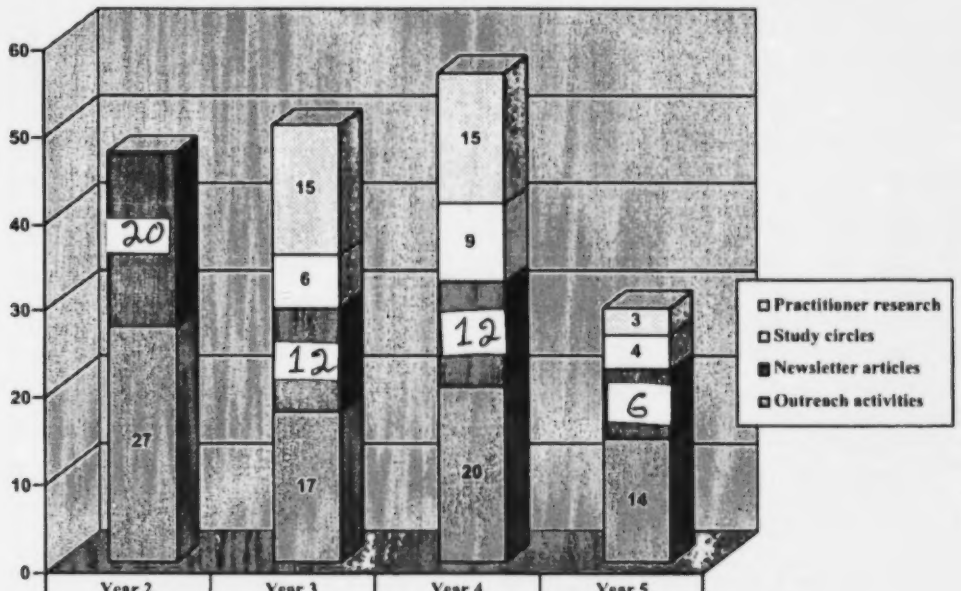
Another aspect of practitioner research that Practitioner Leaders found valuable was the opportunity to collaborate with and consult with the NCSALL academic researchers.

> Without hesitation, I can say that the most rewarding aspect of being a Practitioner Leader has been working with Patsy Medina on both the ABE and ESOL Classroom Dynamics studies. . . . What has stood out for me has been recognizing the value placed by these researchers on collaboration with practitioners.
>
> **Susan Finn Miller, Practitioner Leader**

Summary of PDRN Activities

Practitioner Leaders were involved in a variety of activities, and the activities each did varied. There were more presentations and newsletter articles—130 over four years—than any other activity. The PDRN also conducted 19 study circles and implemented 33 practitioner research projects.

Figure 8: Total Activities Per Year



	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Practitioner research	0	15	15	3
Study circles	0	6	9	4
Newsletter articles	20	12	12	8
Outreach activitie	27	17	20	14

In terms of impact, the study circles and practitioner research projects seemed to be most important. Both brought practitioners together to discuss their practice in terms of research and research in terms of their own practice. Both took place over time and involved participants in reflection on their work. The Practitioner Leaders saw these kinds of opportunities to look at an issue in depth as more effective than their efforts to disseminate information more broadly.

Factors Affecting PDRN Work

To better understand what helped the PDRN function as a network connecting practitioners and researchers, as well as what hindered the PDRN, we examined supporting and hindering factors. The stories the Practitioner Leaders and PDRN staff wrote as part of the final evaluation were the primary source of data for this

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

section. Other data came from reports on regional meetings held with state teams in the final year.

The PDRN carried out a series of activities designed to connect research and practice, including outreach efforts, study circles, and practitioner research in which Practitioner Leaders connected with and educated practitioners within their states. As the PDRN was a research and development effort, building and managing it also involved setting up and maintaining the network. This included training and supporting the Practitioner Leaders, developing the PDRN staff capacities, designing communication mechanisms linking people within the network, and working to build connections with NCSALL researchers. In this section, we address the internal and external factors that supported the PDRN work and those that hindered it.

Supporting Factors

Support to help build the PDRN and the skills of Practitioners Leaders came from the PDRN staff, the Practitioner Leaders, and people and events outside the PDRN project.

Supporting Factors Within the PDRN

A number of factors within the PDRN structure supported its participants' work. These included national and regional meetings, the ongoing support from the PDRN Coordinators, the collaborative nature of many of the projects, the practitioner research training, the PDRN listserv, and the overall commitment and enthusiasm of the initiative's participants.

- National and regional meetings were a primary factor in building and supporting the PDRN. At the meetings, participants were able to share experiences, reflect on their work, and plan future work. The following quotes express the importance of these gatherings to participants.

> I found the regional meeting a good source of support and information sharing. It was very valuable to hear what the other state officials and Practitioner Leaders were facing and accomplishing in their own states. The regional meeting helped recharge my batteries and refocus my energies on this important work.
>
> **Joyce Munda, Practitioner Leader**

> [At the Maryville national meeting] we could see the dream and potential of the PDRN in action: New knowledge was being created, practice was contributing to research and research to practice, and teachers and researchers were being equally respected for the expertise that each bring.
>
> **Judy Hofer, PDRN Coordinator**

> The [first national] meeting truly "broke the ice" and melted preconceived feelings about researchers and practitioners. This was a welcoming arena where ideas and hopes were shared by each researcher, as well as our dreams of how this liaison between practitioner and researcher could work.
>
> **Pam Meader, Practitioner Leader**

> It [the Maryville national meeting] was an interesting early lesson for me on the importance of face-to-face human contact—it's irreplaceable, and a very important piece of the puzzle in "connecting research and practice."
>
> **Sam Gordenstein, PDRN Staff**

> My regional meetings of the PDRN introduced me to reading research and reflecting on the implications individually and in our small group. It seemed like a great way to increase my knowledge in a meaningful way.
>
> **Kerren Vallone, Practitioner Leader**

- The support the PDRN Coordinators provided Practitioner Leaders was important in a project that demanded initiative and creativity from participants.

> [My coordinator] gave me great confidence through her clear-sightedness and discernment.
>
> **Susan Bubp, Practitioner Leader**

> [The staff] supported us in every endeavor, helped us venture into new territories, and provided us with the vision of what the PDRN could be.
>
> **Pam Meader, Practitioner Leader**

> Without question the most rewarding aspect was working directly with practitioners and endeavoring to bring them into situations where they could work closely and meaningfully with NCSALL researchers.
>
> **Cristine Smith, PDRN Coordinator**

> I got a lot of support from my supervisors at NCSALL, and the way that I got it was important. It was more guidance, even direct help at times, but always leaving me in control.
>
> **Nicole Graves, Practitioner Leader**

- Collaboration among Practitioner Leaders supported the PDRN efforts. Although staff support was needed, in many instances, the Practitioner Leaders learned from each other's experiences.

I was impressed by how much the Practitioner Leaders learned from one another and fed off each other's energy and insights, and I could see how the group actually inspired the Practitioner Leaders to do their best. This led me to think more about the importance of teacher collegiality to teachers' own learning and sense of themselves as professionals.

Judy Hofer, PDRN Coordinator

As adult educators share experiences common to their teaching situations and those unique to their programs, we all gain. We gain in knowing that there are others with the same challenges. We gain in hearing about their attempts at solutions that utilize the research presented. We gain from sharing our own program expertise and from being asked.

Joyce Munda, Practitioner Leader

- Training in practitioner research built the skills and confidence of the Practitioner Leaders.

The training that I received from [the coordinator] on practitioner research allowed me not only to become a better administrator, but also to become involved in developing a practitioner research group in Kentucky.

Kristin Tiedeman, Practitioner Leader

The first regional meeting and subsequent ones that year were a high for me. I learned a lot about doing research. I really learned the process.

Nicole Graves, Practitioner Leader

We learned how to observe with a critical eye and carefully record our observations.

Susan Finn Miller, Practitioner Leader

Our [research] task was broken into three support meeting times when a particular part of the research was due. I can say this method not only helped make the task less daunting, but it also provided wonderful support and encouragement for all of us. Besides being informative, the support meetings provided each of us with energy and ideas to continue with our projects.

Pam Meader, Practitioner Leader

- The PDRN e-mail list became an important communication channel and essential tool in the participatory evaluation.

I think we learned that it was very important that the PDRN be informed and kept up to date. One result was the formation of the listserv, which, while shaky at first, has become a viable means of communicating information quickly and expediently.

Pam Meader, Practitioner Leader

In thinking about some of the practical and helpful factors affecting my job, the listserv quickly comes to mind. The PDRN listserv and electronic bulletin board, comprised of and intended solely for the PDRN members, was immensely helpful in allowing the PDRN to easily communicate across three regions.

Sam Gordenstein, PDRN Staff

- The Practitioner Leaders' commitment and enthusiasm were crucial to creating a new evolving initiative.

> People were willing to try new things and to extend themselves. They have engaged in their classes, their states, and in national forums. Their enthusiasm and dedication is inspiring.
>
> **Beth Bingman, PDRN Coordinator**

Supporting Factors External to the PDRN

A number of factors outside the PDRN structure supported its participants in their work. These included funding from some of the PDRN states, teachers' hunger for knowledge, and the NCSALL researchers' involvement.

- State support and funding was important to the PDRN in some states.

> The support from my state staff, in particular our state literacy resource center director, helped me the most in my PDRN activities. I was able to get the guidance and resources necessary in order to conduct my study circle and to disseminate information about the PDRN throughout the state.
>
> **Patrick Pittman, Practitioner Leader**

> The PDRN Leader in Virginia not only had the support of NCSALL but was supported in every way by the state adult learning resource center. This support proved to be a valuable aspect of being the Practitioner Leader because of the structure, resources and personnel Virginia already has in place. Virginia's system offered each teacher a stipend to participate, allowing program coordinators to pay teachers for their time.
>
> **Sue Barton, Practitioner Leader**

- Teachers' hunger for knowledge, theory, and interaction with one another was identified as a key element by the Practitioner Leaders, who were encouraged by the response they received from teachers in study circles and other activities.

> Practitioners are starving for information and sharing of ideas and have much to offer as well.
>
> **Pam Meader, Practitioner Leader**

> Teachers want more knowledge; seeing others around them speak with enthusiasm and excitement about their own research or participating in a study circle is contagious.
>
> **Susan Bubp, Practitioner Leader**

- Involvement of researchers from NCSALL studies helped bridge the perceived gap between research and practice.

> The researchers who did attend [the national meetings] were genuinely interested in the work of the Practitioner Leaders.
>
> **Judy Hofer, PDRN Coordinator**

> As the "researchers" revealed with each passing hour [at the Maryville national meeting] more of their enthusiasm for the subject matter and respect for practitioner work, the imagined gulf disappeared, replaced by genuine discussion on a given research topic.
>
> **Sam Gordenstein, PDRN Staff**

Hindering Factors

The evaluation helped us identify a number of factors both inside and outside the project that made the PDRN effort more difficult.

Hindering Factors Within the PDRN

A number of factors within the PDRN's structure hindered its participants in their work. These included a lack of clarity about roles, lack of time (for Practitioner Leaders and coordinators), Practitioner Leader turnover, and difficulty disseminating updated NCSALL products to Practitioner Leaders in a timely manner.

- The PDRN was a research and development project, without a prescribed structure and plan at the beginning. The design of the PDRN evolved as the work progressed, based on the decisions of the PDRN Coordinators and Practitioner Leaders. Such a participatory process sometimes resulted in a lack of clarity about work and roles, leading to frustration on the part of the Practitioner Leaders.

> When I got to the regional meeting and found that our work was suddenly to take a new direction, I was very disturbed. I felt that we, as Practitioner Leaders, had little say in how our time was to be used.
>
> **Alice Levine, Practitioner Leader**

> I remember feeling the contradiction of not wanting to be too "top down" while at the same time trying not to frustrate practitioners who seemed to want answers from us about what they were supposed to do.
>
> **Cristine Smith, PDRN Coordinator**

> I truly feel that all parties need to understand their positions and requirements at the beginning of their tenure with the program.
>
> **Kim Stewart, PDRN Coordinator**

- Lack of time for Practitioner Leaders was a major hindering factor. NCSALL had limited funds for the project, and the Practitioner Leaders all had other jobs.

Most Practitioner Leaders spent more than their funded time on the project but never felt they had done as much as they had wanted.

> Because this was a part-time position on top of my job as a teacher 40 hours a week, it has been difficult to accomplish all I wanted to accomplish.
>
> **Joyce Munda, Practitioner Leader**

> While the PDRN has been very supportive financially and has recognized and been sensitive to our workload, there are times when the tasks of the PDRN, compounded with a full teaching load, can be daunting.
>
> **Pam Meader, Practitioner Leader**

> Probably as with the others, a lack of time was a very frustrating aspect of being a Practitioner Leader.
>
> **Patrick Pittman, Practitioner Leader**

> Another difficult part of being a Practitioner Leader was working full-time and trying to fit in these extra duties.
>
> **Kristin Tiedeman, Practitioner Leader**

> The limited time to read the materials and to digest the information left me unable to do the best job possible.
>
> **Melly Chu Joy, Practitioner Leader**

> The only thing that frustrated me about being a Practitioner Leader was allotting time to pursue my chosen activities. . . . I would like to read more research and communicate more with other people about putting it into practice.
>
> **Kerren Vallone, Practitioner Leader**

- Limited time was also a problem for the PDRN Coordinators, who were all involved in other projects and research.

> A constant frustration was my lack of time to support the Practitioner Leaders even more.
>
> **Judy Hofer, PDRN Coordinator**

> The whole endeavor would have been better with more coordinator involvement and support: We as coordinators were constantly scrambling to try to finish things on time.
>
> **Cristine Smith, PDRN Coordinator**

- Keeping research information and products updated and distributed to Practitioner Leaders was an ongoing issue. Because of limited staff time as well as the timetables of the research projects, the PDRN staff were not able to give the Practitioner Leaders what they wanted and needed, particularly in the early days of the project.

> The learner retention/persistence study guide was not completed by the time I started the study circle, so I received the design piecemeal, session by session.
>
> **Susan Bubp, Practitioner Leader**

> The hardest part of being a practitioner leader was the "outreach" piece. I never felt comfortable presenting at conferences as though I was an "expert" on NCSALL and the research being done by them.
>
> **Kristin Tiedeman, Practitioner Leader**

- Turnover of Practitioner Leaders interrupted the PDRN process in many states. The original plan was to have Practitioner Leaders serve for two years, but it later became apparent that it made more sense for them to stay in the position longer to build their expertise and connections. Only three of the original Practitioner Leaders continued through the last year, and one of those took a maternity leave during that time. Eleven Practitioner Leaders had resigned by the final year. Their reasons varied, but the primary reason was an inability to combine their PDRN work with their regular job and/or their personal lives.

> The pacing and workload of the position was becoming increasingly problematic for me.
>
> **Alice Levine, Practitioner Leader**

Hindering Factors External to the PDRN

A number of factors outside the PDRN structure hindered its participants in their PDRN work. These included lack of NCSALL researcher feedback, a high state staff turnover rate, lack of local and state financial support, and the limited reach of some of the state systems.

- Getting information and/or feedback from some NCSALL researchers was difficult. Some researchers saw value to their own work in working with practitioner researchers, but others did not seem to have the same view.

> I do know it would have been very gratifying and helpful to my professional development if I had gotten any kind of feedback on my research project from the researchers, but I did not.
>
> **Susan Bubp, Practitioner Leader**

> Another challenging area was the difficulty around completing the "loop" of the PDRN so that it could influence research. For example, it is unclear to what extent researchers were interested in the study circle feedback of Practitioner Leaders, or how helpful that feedback was.
>
> **Judy Hofer, PDRN Coordinator**

> It was very frustrating to me that after establishing what I thought were important connections with several of the researchers, once the conference workshops were complete, I had no further contact with any of them.
>
> **Alice Levine, Practitioner Leader**

As far as the researchers go, I do not feel that I have had any impact. It would have been nice to have more contact with them, but I am not sure in what way. I guess I would have liked to be able to be a part of their research.

Kristin Tiedeman, Practitioner Leader

Geographical distance was no friend to this issue. Had researchers been able to quickly travel to programs or had Practitioner Leaders been able to stay updated about the research more regularly, maybe the excitement [apparent at the national meetings] could have stuck around longer.

Kim Stewart, PDRN Coordinator

It was frustrating when I attempted to make contact with the researcher, and I could not. It would have been of more interest to the participants if the researcher could have attended out state conference and participated in our workshops. The researcher could have answered participants' questions about the research.

Sue Barton, Practitioner Leader

Researchers are a question I cannot answer. I am not sure this was a two-way street as I had hoped. It was a disappointment. I would like to know if they read our suggestions, if they had questions for us and comments.

Nicole Graves, Practitioner Leader

- State staff turnover hindered PDRN work in some states, because both PDRN Coordinators and Practitioner Leaders found it difficult to continually re-educate new staff about the PDRN effort.

Another challenge has been the development of supportive relationships with state teams, in large part due to the turnover in state team representatives.

Judy Hofer, PDRN Coordinator

I wish I could have disseminated our findings throughout the year in my state. It was not possible due to the fact that the leadership state representative/contact person changed three times within 13 months

Melly Chu Joy, Practitioner Leader

- Lack of state and local financial support for practitioners' professional development limited participation in study circles in some states.

I did encounter some frustrating times. First, recruitment for the study circles was difficult for many reasons. One was finding a time and place that worked for everyone. Second, I felt somewhat embarrassed to know I was receiving a stipend from NCSALL to do this while participants received no remuneration. All the state offered them was CEUs towards recertification.

Pam Meader, Practitioner Leader

> I would argue that the overall impact of the PDRN on Rhode Island adult education practice was severely limited by insufficient funding and systemic restrictions practitioners face in accessing sustained research-based professional development.
>
> **David Hayes, Practitioner Leader**

- Although most states were enthusiastic about the PDRN even if they did not provide funding for professional development time, the limits of state systems hindered both the implementation and impact of the PDRN.

> By far the most difficult aspect of PDRN membership was my inability to transfer the importance of PDRN activities up the chain to department heads. My immediate supervisor was very receptive and encouraging, but it seemed as though the higher positions in the chain were not able to assign any real degree of importance to the PDRN effort.
>
> **Art LaChance, Practitioner Leader**

> The study circle enabled participants to educate themselves about standards development, but the lack of a mechanism for facilitating ongoing engagement limited the degree to which it impacted practice.
>
> **David Hayes, Practitioner Leader**

> I don't think we can expect two study circles to automatically institutionalize locally based reflection and analysis of professional articles. The pressures of time, money, and bureaucracy, and the general lack of promotion all undercut the ability of teachers to get together and thoughtfully talk about articles they have studied.
>
> **Tom Smith, Practitioner Leader**

Conclusions about the Factors Affecting PDRN Work

The following figure summarizes the factors as reported by staff and Practitioner Leaders that supported and hindered the development of the PDRN.

Figure 9: Factors Affecting PDRN Work

Supporting Factors	Hindering Factors
▪ Opportunities to meet face-to-face in regional and national meetings ▪ Support provided by PDRN Coordinators ▪ Collaboration among Practitioner Leaders ▪ Training in practitioner research ▪ PDRN internal listserv ▪ Practitioner Leaders' commitment and enthusiasm ▪ State support and funding ▪ Teachers' hunger for information and interaction ▪ Involvement of some NCSALL researchers	▪ Lack of clarity during the project's evolution ▪ Lack of time for both Practitioner Leaders and staff ▪ Lack of access to updated information on research projects ▪ Turnover of Practitioner Leaders ▪ Limited involvement of some NCSALL researchers ▪ Turnover of state staff ▪ Limited support for professional development in some states

Overall, four categories of factors affected the work and development of the PDRN:

1. The dedication and enthusiasm of the people involved
2. Financial factors
3. The experimental nature of the PDRN effort
4. The nature of the adult basic education and literacy field

The enthusiasm of the Practitioner Leaders was a key factor in the PDRN's existence and development. Without their dedication and effort, the PDRN would never have existed at all. The engagement of practitioners and staff within the states also supported the PDRN in starting and continuing, and the coordinators' efforts to make the PDRN as successful as possible helped sustain it during a sometimes bumpy evolution.

Dedicated funding within the NCSALL budget allowed the PDRN to happen, and the ability to pay for Practitioner Leaders' and coordinators' time, travel to regional and national meetings, and professional development was an important part of building the network and conducting activities to connect research and practice. Funding of a practitioner researcher by some states was also a supportive factor in

allowing more practitioners to connect with researchers. However, never having attempted an initiative such as the PDRN before, it was impossible to know how much money would be required to make it successful. As it turns out, more NCSALL funding might have permitted more time for the Practitioner Leaders to engage in other dissemination activities; it might also have permitted more face-to-face meetings and more time for the coordinators to support Practitioner Leaders and work with state teams. Lack of funding at the state level for practitioners to participate in professional development activities such as study circles was also problematic, and this resulted in the Practitioner Leaders' difficulties in recruiting for study circles.

The PDRN's experimental nature and the NCSALL PDRN staff's commitment to building the PDRN through a participatory process meant there were times when what should or would happen was not very clear. Although this meant the PDRN could correct its course, change its structure, or add new activities when it seemed warranted, it also meant that PDRN members who wanted more clear-cut direction sometimes felt confused or frustrated. We learned valuable lessons about supporting practitioners in connecting with researchers through this process, but those lessons were sometimes learned at the cost of some trial and error, and some of those errors were more hard-hitting than others.

Finally, the nature of the adult basic education and literacy system is such that turnover among practitioners and staff is high, and a communication infrastructure is not well established. Some PDRN states did not have a newsletter through which information about NCSALL's research could be conveyed; others did not have mailing lists the Practitioner Leaders could readily use to recruit practitioners to study circles. Although future efforts to connect practice and research can involve more funding, incorporate lessons learned, and certainly build on the enthusiasm of the practitioners involved, it is hard to envision how to reduce some of these infra-structure and working condition barriers without major reforms in the field itself.

Impact of the PDRN

The impact of the PDRN was gauged through self-reports of those involved in the network: Practitioner Leaders, researchers, state team members, and PDRN Coordinators. Using the themes highlighted at the final national meeting, when the participatory evaluation data was analyzed, we combed through all of the stories and reports to find the specific quotes that supported each theme. Those areas of impact and supporting quotes are reported here. The PDRN had an impact on the Practitioner Leaders and their students and programs; on NCSALL and NCSALL

researchers and staff; and beyond NCSALL, on practitioners who participated in PDRN activities and on the states that took part in the PDRN.

Impact on Practitioner Leaders and on the Students and Programs with whom They Work

Impact on PDRN Practitioner Leaders

Practitioner Leaders, who were the most directly involved in the PDRN, felt the greatest impact of the PDRN.

- Practitioner Leaders reported an increased awareness of the structure and issues of the field of adult basic education and literacy.

> The PDRN project has given the field of adult education more credibility and more possibility. This project has shown me that the role of the adult education teacher can be even broader than I ever had imagined it could be.
>
> **Susan Bubp, Practitioner Leader**

> My experience with the network has strengthened my understanding of adult education.
>
> **David Hayes, Practitioner Leader**

> Hindsight reveals that I had a fairly closed-minded approach to adult literacy prior to my involvement in the PDRN. . . . The first focus group activity was very exciting and informative for me. I was able to combine my experiences with those of my peers and almost immediately developed a more enthusiastic outlook. I became increasingly aware of new thoughts and ideas. I learned a great deal about adult literacy in a very short time, due in large part to my involvement in the PDRN. Communicating with practitioners from other states made me acutely aware of the instability and relative ineffectiveness of the national adult literacy effort.
>
> **Art LaChance, Practitioner Leader**

> The greatest impact that the PDRN had for me was that I saw myself moving from being egocentric concerning implementation of adult education activities at my school to becoming more aware of adult education activities throughout the nation. I began to realize the vast differences in approaches to adult learning and literacy. I learned that no two programs are identical and that the practices of my program may not be appropriate for others. . . . felt that my role moved from implementation to reflection to evaluation.
>
> **Patrick Pittman, Practitioner Leader**

> All three study circle groups [that I facilitated] reacted differently to the same NCSALL study circle activities and issues. This realization caused me to reflect upon differences and similarities between programs in our state. I came to appreciate the difficulties rural programs must face due to their isolation.
>
> **Sue Barton, Practitioner Leader**

- Practitioner Leaders increased their knowledge of research and its importance to their own work and to the field. They became consumers of research, and this led to changes in identity (they began to see themselves as researchers).

> My experiences with the NCSALL researchers helped to open that door which allowed me to explore further the "burning questions" I had developed over the years.
>
> **Art LaChance, Practitioner Leader**

> Prior to PDRN, I was an isolated teacher feeling my way through a new course design. There was little in my experience that encouraged me to check out research findings in one of my biggest problem areas—persistence. Working in PDRN gave me a new appreciation for the relevance research can have and, more importantly, showed me how I could be a "scientific" researcher myself. Thus, I went from being an empirical, direct experiencer and passive reader of professional research findings to an active researcher. I moved from a zone of isolation to an individual with contacts in other parts of New England, discovering peers who shared an enthusiasm for analyzing our teaching practices. I give more credibility to the ongoing research in the field.
>
> **Tom Smith, Practitioner Leader**

> The PDRN has transformed me both personally and professionally. Before the PDRN, I would read an occasional research abstract, usually from the K–12 arena, and try to apply it to my classroom. I was not aware of research done in the adult education arena. Now, not only am I aware of adult education research, I am a researcher myself. I don't shy away from research articles but instead have developed a means of understanding the research process and analyzing results.
>
> **Pam Meader, Practitioner Leader**

> I read much more of the research and realized that some research is more "usable" for practitioners than I had originally thought.
>
> **Kristin Tiedeman, Practitioner Leader**

> To listen and to learn current practices from research has been a great reward.
>
> **Melly Chu Joy, Practitioner Leader**

> My experience with the PDRN has been one of the most stimulating events of my professional career. It stimulated my interest in literacy research and encouraged me to incorporate the knowledge gained from that research into my practice. The PDRN introduced me to reading research and reflecting on the implications individually and in our small group. It seemed like a great way to increase my knowledge in a meaningful way. . . . Probably the most valuable aspect of my experience was recognizing and accepting "research into practice" and "practice into research." I was trained in organizing my own research project. After reading samples of work by other practitioners, I realized that any teacher could create a simple research project in his/her own classroom. . . . It was useful for me to organize and reflect on my observations, and I think other practitioners will be able to relate my findings to their experiences using computers with their students.
>
> **Kerren Vallone, Practitioner Leader**

I learned a lot about doing research, although I had had some practice doing projects for classes I had taken over the years. I really learned the process. I gained what I wanted to learn and I gained more by interacting with the other members of the group.

Nicole Graves, Practitioner Leader

- Practitioner Leaders reported change in their stance toward inquiry and new ideas.

My PDRN work has taught me how to identify specific concerns from practice and to develop the means to address them. I've learned how to better conduct inquiry into my own practice and help others to do the same.

David Hayes, Practitioner Leader

I've subscribed to the NLA listserv and have enjoyed many of the policy debates taking place among practitioners.

Tom Smith, Practitioner Leader

Before the PDRN, I had found myself using the same strategies and not looking for ways to improve the program or myself. After becoming involved, it seems that I have become more open-minded and have begun constantly looking for ways to improve the program.

Kristin Tiedeman, Practitioner Leader

NCSALL has transformed me into being more knowledgeable and has changed my focus and point of view. Now, I am more open to suggestions and willing to communicate.

Melly Chu Joy, Practitioner Leader

I have become more introspective about my own practice and more aware of what other teachers are discovering in their own informal research.

Susan Bubp, Practitioner Leader

- PDRN experiences helped Practitioner Leaders make changes in their teaching and program practice.

The marvelous part of the study circle experience is that all the learning, both in content and form, has influenced and transferred to my teaching. I can see how a more structured, formalized style of lesson preparation can coexist with elements of improvisation. . . . Both elements can be accommodated and actually beneficial to different kinds of students.

Susan Bubp, Practitioner Leader

At the beginning of each new semester, I share with my students some research from NCSALL. . . . I have also shared the research process with my algebra students and have asked them to do a research project of their own. Even my low-level general science class can see the similarities between the scientific method and the research process.

Pam Meader, Practitioner Leader

I continue to use the findings from the study [her practitioner research about successful students] with my current students to tell them about the hurdles other students faced and how they eventually prevailed.

Susan Bubp, Practitioner Leader

We have struggled with persistence for years. After I read the NCSALL study, I expanded the time spent on goal-setting in our program.

Kerren Vallone, Practitioner Leader

If I had not been involved with the PDRN during those years, I would not have modified my approach and certainly would not have shared those modifications with those who work with me.

Art LaChance, Practitioner Leader

My participation in the PDRN has been the beginning of a process to better understand the prevalent instructional practices within my classes and to begin to identify areas that are in need of more attention.

Melly Chu Joy, Practitioner Leader

My first research project was about motivation, persistence, and retention. I experimented with different practices we were using in our classes and with my own students and modified them based on some of the research findings. We improved our goal-setting lessons and techniques, for example. Due to these changes, our attendance and retention rates have improved. This past year, my research focused on assessment tools. As part of this work, I have revised our progress reports.

Nicole Graves, Practitioner Leader

- Some Practitioner Leaders expressed an increase in their commitment to the field and a change in their identity as a member of the field.

Through my work in the PDRN, I have matured as an educator, expanded my professional focus and my ability to impact the field, and ultimately redirected my career.

David Hayes, Practitioner Leader

I have been able to openly discuss my shortcomings with my principal and take a giant step toward professional maturity.

Melly Chu Joy, Practitioner Leader

There have been many rewarding aspects of being a Practitioner Leader. First and foremost was feeling that I was involved in efforts to improve the adult literacy profession.

Kerren Vallone, Practitioner Leader

- Practitioner Leaders reported an increase in collegiality with practitioners in their state and in the network.

> Another rewarding aspect of being a Practitioner Leader has been the interaction between other adults educators and me. . . . As adult educators share experiences common to their teaching situations, and those unique to their programs, we all gain.
>
> **Joyce Munda, Practitioner Leader**

> I was able to establish far more effective and lasting associations with peers.
>
> **Art LaChance, Practitioner Leader**

> Another great benefit is to be able to grow professionally from interacting with other colleagues. . . . Not only have I learned from peers and learned to communicate ideas in a more successful way, I have learned about my learners' greatest needs.
>
> **Melly Chu Joy, Practitioner Leader**

> One thing I really liked about the PDRN was that it modeled to practitioners. [Pam Meader] did her own research and shared it with other practitioners.
>
> **Evelyn Beaulieu, Maine State Team Member**

> I feel I have placed the first stone in the path to establish a collegial atmosphere among the practitioners in my school.
>
> **Melly Chu Joy, Practitioner Leader**

- Practitioner Leaders increased their expertise as facilitators of professional development for other practitioners.

> I've learned how to develop and facilitate study circles. . . . The PDRN has provided me with training and experience in professional development.
>
> **David Hayes, Practitioner Leader**

> I have found the study circles to be an incredible experience . . . some of the best staff development work I have ever done, and I think the participants would agree. Unlike the typical one-shot workshop, the study circles give the facilitator and the participants the gift of time. We can read, reflect, discuss ideas with our students, and return to the next meeting with our new insights.
>
> **Susan Bubp, Practitioner Leader**

> I feel that the most rewarding aspect of being a practitioner leader for me was conducting a study circle. Watching the learning and the exchange of ideas among the participants gave me an euphoric "high." I feel that I was responsible for an experience that enriched the personal and professional lives of others.
>
> **Patrick Pittman, Practitioner Leader**

Impact on Students

The PDRN did not work directly with students. However, some Practitioner Leaders talked about the difference their participation had made to students with whom they worked. Students were affected by participating in the Practitioner Leader's research

or benefited from changes in the Practitioner Leader's teaching practices. Impact on students was reported mostly as students' positive response to new practices, strategies, or techniques used in the classroom.

> I feel my students in particular benefited from my exposure to other sources of ideas and ideals involved in delivering services to adult learners.
>
> **Art LaChance, Practitioner Leader**

> I chose to focus on goal setting as the basis for my research question. In expanding the goal-setting procedures, I was able to develop a new way of communicating with students. This has been the high point of my PDRN experience. . . . I now do in-depth intake interviews with my students, identifying special interests, goals, and sensitive areas that I must approach carefully, if at all . . . periodic classwide check-ins to get a reading on how students are feeling about the different activities . . . an extensive exit interview to try to determine what worked and didn't work for each student as well as to see if there are any areas where I can be of future support. My students have been directly affected by the changes in curriculum design . . . they become primary fashioners of the curriculum. In no time, they saw how needs they had expressed in these early interviews were guiding the content of the class . . . not only do they participate in a course directly responsive to their needs, they also understand they are partners in the design rather than passive recipients of a canned format.
>
> **Tom Smith, Practitioner Leader**

> One of the instructors who works for me also participated in the practitioner research group. This work had a direct impact on her students. Because of her own inquiry, she has been very active in incorporating EFF and Quantum Teaching into her classes.
>
> **Kristin Tiedeman, Practitioner Leader**

> Before my participation in NCSALL, several of the essential elements of effective lessons were missing and/or inappropriately used. My lesson objectives were vague, expressed in terms of discrete activities. There was rarely any closure to lessons or a review of what I had taught. Now, closure is helping my learners to review and summarize the lesson and determine if the lesson goals have been met. . . . I am delivering a richer mixture of learning activities that challenge all my learners within a whole-class setting, so no learner wastes valuable time waiting for other learners to complete class work. The learners have developed a sense of self-confidence as a result of their successful learning experiences.
>
> **Melly Chu Joy, Practitioner Leader**

Impact on Programs

Almost all Practitioner Leaders reported changes they had made in their programs that had an impact on the program and its staff. Many of these changes stemmed from the Practitioner Leaders' new ideas resulting from the research they had read or the research projects they had conducted.

> I constantly share ideas and resources with my staff and recently shared goal-setting with the southern area practitioners of my state.

Pam Meader, Practitioner Leader

My center's methods of service delivery changed and improved as a direct result of my PDRN association. Next came a more thorough and accurate intake evaluation that provided a much more effective means with which to determine placement. . . . Review of the NCSALL research reports helped enlighten us further on a wide range of realistic issues that helped expand our understanding of the adult literacy student.

Art LaChance, Practitioner Leader

Once teachers are versed in methods of research and see the benefits of analyzing practitioner work, they could be encouraged to do their own research to share with the program. The PDRN was beginning to have that effect in my area, as the program director encouraged teachers to research a question their work was raising. However, to better actualize this goal, teachers needed to be trained and offered the kind of supervision I received in doing my initial PDRN research.

Tom Smith, Practitioner Leader

My program has benefited not only from my reading and sharing of research findings but also by the instructors taking more responsibility for their classes and improving them. I feel that I have been able to pass on good information to the instructors. . . . I wasn't just someone who was giving out information, but rather, it seemed as though I became someone who was really assisting instructors to improve themselves by themselves. The instructors have become much more proactive in their instruction.

Kristin Tiedeman, Practitioner Leader

I have been able to use the research of others to the benefit of my own program. I initiated a research project to find out what characteristics of a classroom atmosphere and what aspects of an adult education program directly affect retention. I created a reflection tool for my teachers to use when evaluating their classroom. I plan to use those aspects that affect retention to be benchmark points for teacher assessment.

Sue Barton, Practitioner Leader

I have also had the opportunity to connect Rutgers researchers with some of the teachers in my program. When I explained the purpose of NCSALL, the teachers readily allowed the researchers access to their classrooms. The researchers got the opportunity to observe a literacy class, and the teachers felt that they were contributing to their profession.

Kerren Vallone, Practitioner Leader

I have learned to plan staff meetings at my program where teachers work together on a specific question or topic, such as motivation or why reflection is important for our students. I often set up similar guidelines, as in a study circle plan but with more flexibility. . . . The planned activities and the group interactions are more in line with the way we feel we should teach in our program. It is a way of modeling or practicing what we preach.

Nicole Graves, Practitioner Leader

Impact on NCSALL

During the discussions at the national meetings, especially the final meeting in May 2001, NCSALL researchers and PDRN staff identified the following impacts of the PDRN on NCSALL as a research center:

- Better perception within the field that NCSALL wants to connect to the field
- Better designed research
- Better understanding of the role of professional development in connecting practice and research
- Better understanding of how and why to connect researchers and practitioners in real, meaningful research work

Impact on NCSALL Researchers

- NCSALL researchers involved in this evaluation felt that contact with practitioners led to improvements in the research itself.

> The PDRN made it much easier for my research team to make contact with programs and practitioners. . . . The PDRN has provided a constant connection for NCSALL to practitioners that has helped and affected some research projects more than others but has had an impact on all aspects of the center.
>
> **John Comings, Harvard Researcher**

> The biggest impact that my work with the PDRN has on Rutgers is that I have been able to share data and initial findings from our research projects with the Practitioner Leaders, and their feedback has been invaluable. In addition, [a] Practitioner Leader and two practitioner researchers became data collectors for our ESOL project. They are now in the process of helping us analyze data.
>
> **Patsy Medina, Rutgers Researcher**

- Researchers reported an increased awareness of the realities of the ABE field, especially through the research that Practitioner Leaders and practitioner researchers conducted in their classrooms and programs on the same topics that NCSALL researchers were studying.

> When the practitioners tried out the findings from my research in their programs, I gained new insights into what my findings might mean.
>
> **John Comings, Harvard Researcher**

However, Practitioner Leaders were, at times, less sure whether researchers were affected by their work within the PDRN.

> How much impact the PDRN . . . has had on researchers is a question I cannot answer. I am not sure this was a two-way street, as I had hoped. It was a disappointment. I would have liked to know if they read our suggestions, if they had questions for us, and comments.
>
> **Nicole Graves, Practitioner Leader**

Impact on PDRN Coordinators

- PDRN Coordinators felt they learned a great deal about how to create and maintain networks of practitioners in the field of adult basic education and literacy.

> We were in the initial years of forming a novel network with huge goals. This created a good amount of excitement and some frustration. It is critical to know what needs to get done, when you only have limited time to do it. . . . I feel that even the initial stages of a program that desires individual input needs to have a framework for participants' thinking. It is better to add more independence than to take it away as the program evolves.
>
> **Kim Stewart, PDRN Coordinator**

- The PDRN Coordinators also clarified their own roles and identities as members of the field of adult learning and literacy.

> The PDRN helped me see where I think I have the most to offer this field. . . . I'd like to find ways to continue to support teachers in their work and be a bridge between research and practice.
>
> **Judy Hofer, PDRN Coordinator**

> I see an expanded role for myself in fostering connections between research and practice, such as the work we did to integrate the PDRN into state systems. We have heard our work and ideas validated—by the Practitioner Leaders, by state team members, and by others in our field. . . . I can see a role for myself in telling the PDRN story and building on it to maintain what we've built together and to make new research and practice connections.
>
> **Beth Bingman, PDRN Coordinator**

> I am comfortably entrenched in my identity as a researcher. The PDRN has helped me redefine for myself what research can be. . . . I have come to define research as a reflective, collaborative process, which is how I define teaching.
>
> **Patsy Medina, PDRN Coordinator**

Impact Beyond NCSALL

Impact on Practitioners

A number of practitioners were affected by the PDRN either through their participation in practitioner research or study circles, or as a colleague working in a program in which a Practitioner Leader had instituted changes. However, it was hard to gauge

actual changes in practitioners, and some Practitioner Leaders doubted it was very great.

- Practitioner Leaders reported that the practitioners who had attended study circles or had been engaged in practitioner research demonstrated gains in knowledge and changes in practice, but these were hard to gauge.

> Wherever practitioners have been able to engage with NCSALL work, the impact upon their practice has been positive but very limited. Any effort to bridge the gap between research and practice in a way that creates deep and lasting change, must be sustained long enough for the development of improvements in practice to occur.
>
> **David Hayes, Practitioner Leader**

> We [teachers who had participated in practitioner research with the PDRN] worked together to present at our state conference on how their practice has changed since they shifted from using primarily individualized instruction to using student learning groups.
>
> **Susan Finn Miller, Practitioner Leader**

- Practitioners professed a greater desire for nontraditional professional development, such as study circles and practitioner research, to help them learn about research.

> The participants [in the practitioner research group] became advocates for nontraditional professional development, which has helped to expand this thinking through the state.
>
> **Kristin Tiedeman, Practitioner Leader**

> Teachers realized that study circles were an effective form of staff development and a powerful way to communicate best practices to the adult education field. All of the participants were proud of the work that they had generated during the study circle.
>
> **Sue Barton, Practitioner Leader**

> Practitioner research is incredibly important. It's the way to make research useful to teachers. They are answering questions with a structure that allows them to explore.
>
> **New England State Team Member**

- Some practitioners felt less isolated after participating in the study circles, which are highly interactive.

> Participants liked the camaraderie and small group setting [of the study circle] and enjoyed learning from each other and from the research articles . . . The opportunity to talk about what was going on in adult education research brought administrators and teachers closer together, enhancing their relationship through communication, which provided an opportunity for teachers in various types of classrooms to articulate perspectives . . . [this] gave teachers a platform to articulate challenges that they faced in adult education.
>
> **Sue Barton, Practitioner Leader**

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

> I think the PDRN work is very important because it offers opportunities for teachers to work together on selected topics. Teachers tell me that reading articles and books to satisfy their own quest for knowledge and/or to account for required staff development is simply not enough. They want discussions. Many teachers are isolated within their own programs because of scheduling or working at another job. . . . The study circle format works well because it focuses on one topic, requires a group of peers, happens over a fairly short period of time but allows for reflection between meetings, provides quality materials, and is usually accessible. . . . Study circles directly touch a specific number of people, and then there is a ripple effect. These people in turn touch others and so on. That is a practical way to increase dissemination.
>
> **Nicole Graves, Practitioner Leader**

- Practitioners became more frequent consumers of research.

> I recently saw one of the participants, and she said that she continues to use the practitioner research process in her work.
>
> **Kristin Tiedeman, Practitioner Leader**

> The practitioners in my program tell me that have access to materials they did not know about because I shared NCSALL reports, research briefs, and other information with them.
>
> **Nicole Graves, Practitioner Leader**

- Practitioner Leaders reported that some practitioners had a better understanding of the larger field of adult learning and literacy after participating in study circles or practitioner research.

> Teachers realized that they received much more than knowledge about program structure. Teachers came away from the [study circle] experience with the big picture of adult education and with an appreciation of the work accomplished by other practitioners.
>
> **Sue Barton, Practitioner Leader**

Impact on States

Practitioner Leaders and state team staff reported impacts on state staff and systems, including a desire to continue connecting research and practice in some states and initiation of practitioner research in states where it hadn't existed. Other specific impacts included:

- The study circles and practitioner research sometimes produced new knowledge and products that were shared with other practitioners in the states, through the state systems.

> I wanted to study successful learners—people who made it despite the chaos in their lives. I conducted a focus group with former students. . . . Students in the focus group were saying that their teachers' support and credibility was paramount to their success. . . . I gave a copy

> [of the practitioner research report] to the state director of ABE, and he liked it well enough to distribute it to local directors around the state. The state staff development coordinator included it in her training packet of materials for new staff.
>
> **Susan Bubp, Practitioner Leader**

> Even though the original intent of the study circle was not to develop a finished product, my group did just that. At the conclusion of the circle, a document was created with recommendations for the state office concerning our current accountability system. In this way, the group felt that it had input that would hopefully influence state policy.
>
> **Patrick Pittman, Practitioner Leader**

- Several state staff felt the addition of study circles was a new and viable method of professional development, and they recognized the increased involvement of practitioners as leaders of staff development as positive.

> I suspect that the influence that my work had on state teams was that they were able to expose more programs to a deeper understanding of the issues important to the adult education community.
>
> **Sue Barton, Practitioner Leader**

> Generally speaking, educational research traditionally sits and gathers dust. It doesn't reach people. I think the PDRN is a great idea.
>
> **Northeast State Team Member**

> Study circles should be designed for policymakers, too.
>
> **Southeast State Team Member**

- State staff (department of education staff and state literacy resource center staff) also reported gaining new ideas through their connection to PDRN.

> I feel a sense of reconnection to the whole field of professional development in adult education because it's so easy to stay focused on my own personal checklist. The connections are very nourishing.
>
> **Southeast State Team Member**

> I got some new ideas to build in my own professional development system.
>
> **Southeast State Team Member**

> I've enjoyed examining some of the underlying issues in this work. I'm interested in the effort to take a look at how national initiatives work with local and state entities.
>
> **Southeast State Team Member**

However, many stated that they wished this connection to the PDRN had been stronger, saying they wished they or other state staff could have been included in the training or national meetings.

Conclusions about the Impact of the PDRN

The strongest impact of the PDRN seems to have been on Practitioner Leaders, followed by an impact on their programs (including practitioners and students). There was also a positive impact, from the researchers' viewpoint, on NCSALL researchers and research, although Practitioner Leaders were less sure about the extent of this impact. We have limited evidence as to how extensive or strong the impact of the PDRN was on teachers who attended PDRN-sponsored staff development (such as study circles or conference presentations) or on their students. Practitioner Leaders reported a range of impacts, including new knowledge and ideas, more collegiality, and more consumption of research by practitioners with whom they came into contact through the PDRN. There also was agreement that practitioner research and study circles are effective ways to help teachers engage in and think about how research might affect their practice. There was a fairly limited impact on state staff who were involved in supporting the PDRN work in their states, but some PDRN activities—such as study circles and practitioner research projects—generated ideas or knowledge shared through non-PDRN mechanisms within the state, such as training and newsletters.

Overall, we conclude that the impact of the PDRN was strongest on those who were most closely involved in the day-to-day work of the PDRN, including the Practitioner Leaders and PDRN Coordinators, with the next-strongest impact being felt at the level of those practitioners and students with whom the Practitioner Leaders worked directly in their programs, followed by practitioners who participated in PDRN-sponsored study circles and practitioner research. Greater impact may have been achieved by increasing the time Practitioner Leaders could spend on PDRN work, length of study circles and number of practitioners involved in them, number of practitioners involved in research in their classrooms and programs, and involvement of NCSALL researchers and state staff in training and meetings with practitioners. All of these activities would have required more NCSALL funding for the PDRN, plus more funding by the state to support practitioner research and paid professional development for practitioners.

Figure 10: Summary of the Impact of the PDRN

Impact on Practitioner Leaders and on the Students and Programs with whom They Work

Practitioner Leaders

- Increased their awareness of the structure and issues of the field
- Increased their knowledge and consumption of research, and identified as a researcher
- Made changes in their teaching and program practice
- Changed their stance toward inquiry and new ideas
- Increased their commitment to the field
- Increased collegiality with other practitioners
- Increased their expertise as facilitators of professional development

Learners

- Positive response to new practices, strategies, or techniques used in the classroom

Programs

- Change in instruction and program processes
- Increased communication about new ideas

Impact on NCSALL

- Increased the perception within the field that NCSALL wants to connect to the field
- Improved the design of NCSALL's research projects
- Increased NCSALL's understanding of the role of professional development in connecting practice and research
- Increased NCSALL staff's understanding of how and why to connect researchers and practitioners

Impact Beyond NCSALL

Practitioners Involved in PDRN Professional Development or Practitioner Research

- Acquired new knowledge and made changes in practice, but hard to gauge
- Increased their desire for nontraditional professional development
- Decreased their feeling of isolation
- Increased their consumption of research
- Enhanced their understanding of the larger field of adult learning and literacy

PDRN States

- Produced new knowledge and products that were shared with other practitioners in the states
- New professional development model (study circles) and emergence of practitioners as facilitators of professional development
- Increased state staff knowledge about research

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The Evolution of the PDRN

In this chapter, we discuss the implications of the evaluation findings and answer the fourth of our evaluation questions: What recommendations for connecting research and practice can be derived from the PDRN research and development effort?

As a research and development project, the PDRN evolved considerably over the span of its five years. Originally envisioned objectives, job descriptions and roles, and specific activities changed according to the needs defined by the PDRN's practitioners, researchers, and coordinators.

For example, the PDRN's specific objectives evolved over time, changing subtly from a focus on disseminating information about NCSALL to a focus on practitioner research as a cornerstone of the partnerships between practitioners and researchers. Helping Practitioner Leaders and local practitioners become research consumers in a substantial way rose to the top among the multitude of objectives originally envisioned for the PDRN. As Practitioner Leaders became much more comfortable with their role as fellow researchers and facilitators of professional development for local practitioners, they could envision a broader set of objectives for the PDRN, including developing leadership in the field and engaging with policymakers. However, although this evaluation indicates the PDRN certainly met the objective of developing leadership among the Practitioner Leaders who were involved, the extent to which the PDRN increased interactions with policymakers is probably small.

The change in objectives brought about changes in the Practitioner Leaders' job description. Originally, their job involved much more "telling about the research" (outreach) and "helping with the research" (conducting focus groups and assisting researchers to find programs within which research could be conducted). These were the major activities in Year 1, when researchers needed help setting up sites for their research and practitioners needed to know that NCSALL existed and learn the type of research it was doing. Also, in Year 1, there were no research results to disseminate because most of NCSALL's research was just starting. However, it became clear by Year 2 that truly connecting practitioners and researchers required involving practi-tioners in research of their own, so they could engage with NCSALL researchers. Thus "doing research" became a much bigger part of the Practitioner Leaders' jobs. Finally, in Years 3 and 4, when NCSALL research results were beginning to emerge, the role of Practitioner Leaders as facilitators of study circles—"helping others learn about research"—began in

earnest, which couldn't have happened in Year 1. Practi-tioner Leaders' jobs also evolved based on their need for more "depth" and less "breadth" in understanding and communicating NCSALL's research.

Finally, another evolution centered around practitioner research itself. In Year 2, when Practitioner Leaders began to conduct their own classroom research, we thought they could play a role in their states by encouraging other practitioners to do research. This role did not develop as such, largely because few states funded practitioner research. Although in several instances Practitioner Leaders "mentored" other practitioners doing research, such a "ripple" effect never materialized, and by Year 3, we dropped it from our objectives and from the job description of the Practitioner Leaders.

These types of evolutionary changes are appropriate for a research and development project that is experimenting with new approaches. We weren't always successful, given geographic and resource constraints, but we attempted to implement the PDRN through a participatory decision-making model. The increasing participation of Practitioner Leaders, in particular, demanded processes for negotiating objectives, jobs, and activities that fit both the needs of NCSALL to understand "what works" in connecting research and practice, and the needs of practitioners who are involved in a research-and-practice network.

Lessons Learned

Over time, the PDRN's primary goal remained the same: to create systematic partnerships between practitioner and university researchers to better connect research and practice, with the ultimate outcome being improved practice, policy, and services for adult learners. We learned this can be accomplished with the right strategies and supports, and doing so has an impact on the practitioners, programs, and states that are involved.

There are four major lessons from the PDRN project:

1. Connecting practitioners and researchers has a positive impact on practitioners and practice.
2. Connecting practitioners and researchers has a positive impact on researchers and research.
3. Effectively connecting practitioners and researchers requires specific *strategies*.
4. Effectively connecting practitioners and researchers requires specific *supports* for Practitioner Leaders, local practitioners, program directors, and state staff.

Below, we discuss each of these major lessons in more detail.

Lesson 1: Connecting practitioners and researchers has a positive impact on practitioners and practice.

Involvement with research expands practitioners' views of the field of adult literacy and their role as professionals in it. Just learning that there is research in the field signals to many practitioners a new concept of their work: This is an established field of education in which research is funded, this field is important enough for research to be conducted, the presence of research implies that there are things to be learned and practice and policy improvements to be made, and such improvements require professional practitioners to make them.

Lesson 2: Connecting practitioners and researchers has a positive impact on researchers and research.

Involving practitioners in research design, implementation, and analysis improves the quality of the research and its connection and applicability to practitioners. The researchers involved in the PDRN felt they better understood how their research "fit" the problems practitioners face and how to improve their research based on the realities of practice. Some also felt practitioners' involvement in the process of research and analysis aided and improved implementation of the research. They recognized that practitioner research offered information that they might not have uncovered, thereby complementing their own research and adding to knowledge on the topic for the field.

Lesson 3: Effectively connecting researchers and practitioners requires specific *strategies.*

- Involve practitioners in the research itself so they become consumers of research. Research consumers look for new research findings; feel comfortable learning about them; know how to analyze them; and think about how to apply them via classroom or program strategies, techniques, and ideas. Practitioners should be involved in efforts to connect practice and research. Not all practitioners have to be involved in doing research themselves: Learning about the results of research (either university or practitioner) from other practitioners is also powerful. When practitioners are involved in research, they see it as something valuable to their work and professional lives, and they seek and use it.

> Teachers want more knowledge; seeing others around them speak with enthusiasm and excitement about their own research or participating in a study circle, whereby they grapple with research generated by the universities, is contagious.
>
> **Susan Bubp, Practitioner Leader**

> In her first workshop, the Practitioner Leader had 35 teachers come because she was a teacher that was sharing research with other teachers. Just to have her being a teacher . . . she has a lot of respect from her peers.
>
> **Maine State Team Member**

- Have practitioner leaders focus on a limited number of research studies. To build practitioner understanding of research, *depth* of understanding and engagement is more important than *breadth*. If Practitioner Leaders are going to help their colleagues understand research findings, it is easier if their job is not to understand dozens of research studies but, rather, one or two research studies—preferably related to their own interests and most preferably related to their own classroom research. For example, we discovered that Practitioner Leaders found it very challenging, if not impossible, to try to summarize findings from even five different NCSALL studies in a conference presentation. However, if a presentation provided findings from their own classroom research on, for example, learner persistence in ABE in conjunction with findings from NCSALL's study on learner persistence, Practitioner Leaders found this much more doable and comfortable, as well as more interesting and relevant to session participants.

- Gain researchers' and practitioners' commitment to work collaboratively on research. This greatly strengthens efforts to connect practice and research. When practitioner researchers chose a topic NCSALL was also researching, and we found ways for practitioner and university researchers to discuss their joint research interests and findings, both the practitioners and researchers learned more than they would have from the research individually. These types of real, preferably face-to-face collaborations—rather than just reading each others' articles—led to changes in the Practitioner Leaders' practice and their programs' practice.

> This kind of collaboration is valuable on a number of levels. Indeed, the PDRN was created for this very purpose. University researchers need access to the field to conduct research. They also recognize that practitioners in the field have important insights about their work with adult learners. Moreover, many practitioners need and want to be challenged to participate at the cutting edge of practice. True collaboration creates spaces for researchers and practitioners to question preconceived assumptions about the field and about their own work. When practitioner researchers and university researchers collaborate, we each bring to the research endeavor unique insights that have the potential to forge powerful and

> innovative change. When practitioners are given voice and are taken seriously, they have the opportunity to identify issues and ideas that have the potential to shake the status quo. Indeed, such collaboration is vital to change.
>
> **Susan Finn Miller, Practitioner Leader**

> Practitioners are starving for information and sharing of ideas and have much to offer as well. Not until the playing field is leveled and researchers begin to ask the field what the field needs—not what researchers "think" they need—will true systemic change begin.
>
> **Pam Meader, Practitioner Leader**

- Select the right Practitioner Leader. Practitioner Leaders with some prior experience with research or a leadership role within their state, as well as a stable job in and long-term commitment to the field, were more effective. They tended to stay in their role for more than one year; as it took awhile for them to understand the PDRN and their responsibilities, their work connecting practice and research was cumulatively more successful. Although facilitating a study circle could be a short-term commitment, conducting classroom research and connecting with NCSALL researchers was a long-term endeavor, and keeping Practitioner Leaders beyond one year meant their contribution to the PDRN became more valuable over time.

- Provide face-to-face meetings, not just long distance connections, between network members (researchers, Practitioner Leaders and PDRN Coordinators). We experimented with many ways to establish and maintain strong connections linking all of the people in this 14-state network. Those included (1) a listserv of all Practitioner Leaders and the PDRN Coordinators; (2) frequent telephone conversations and e-mail messages between Practitioner Leaders and the PDRN Coordinators, and less frequent conversations and messages between NCSALL researchers and Practitioner Leaders; (3) an annual regional meeting of all Practitioner Leaders and their state team members (a representative from the state department of education and a representative from staff development agency); (4) a series of regional workshops about how to do practitioner research during the year; and (5) three national meetings with researchers, Practitioner Leaders,
and PDRN Coordinators. In addition, the PDRN Coordinators had monthly conference calls and twice-yearly meetings to discuss the network's evolving design and implementation.

  The face-to-face meetings were by far the most helpful. At the national meetings, Practitioner Leaders and NCSALL researchers evaluated the PDRN's work and shared their respective research findings. This was invaluable in helping Practitioner Leaders feel they were being "taken seriously" by researchers and helped

the researchers understand the contribution practitioner researchers can make to the generation and use of knowledge. At the regional meetings, Practitioner Leaders and state staff learned about each other's work and increased their understanding of the variety of approaches used in adult education. Face-to-face meetings also enabled the network to gel, helping the Practitioner Leaders feel involved in something significant beyond what they were doing in their state and increasing their commitment to the larger goal.

However, ongoing and institutionalized strategies ensuring that researchers provide feedback to Practitioner Leaders who are writing about research are critical. These were not well established in the PDRN. Although researchers felt positive about the input from and collaboration with practitioners, practitioners did not always feel as positive about the feedback they received from researchers. The PDRN Coordinators perhaps should have established a more concrete process through which practitioners' research reports would be sent to specific researchers, who would respond with written comments about the research content. Such comments would be sent directly to the practitioners, either by the researchers or through the PDRN Coordinators, and practitioners would have a mechanism to respond to the researchers' comments. This might have
led to ongoing dialogues between researchers and practitioners about the practitioners' research and provided the missing element practitioners needed to feel they were having an impact on researchers.

Lesson 4: Effectively connecting researchers and practitioners requires specific *supports* for Practitioner Leaders, local practitioners, program directors, and state staff.

The effectiveness of Practitioner Leaders is directly related to the training, time, and structure they are provided on an ongoing basis. Therefore, necessary supports for Practitioner Leaders include:

- Training and guidance, particularly at the beginning, to understand the broad scope of the project in which they are involved. This was the first time many of the Practitioner Leaders had really understood what was happening outside their program; their involvement required—and gave them—a whole new perspective on the field of adult literacy. Even practitioners who already played a leadership role at some level in their state developed an understanding that the field's scope was broader than they had imagined previously. Supporting practitioners to understand this and play a role in the entire research process (conducting it and disseminating its findings) is critical to ensuring that practitioners feel comfort-

able in that role. In short, a focus only on the effectiveness of the connecting practice and research activities is shortsighted; as in any professional role—especially a newly created one—individuals need training and professional development. The system or process also needs to care about the individuals involved. When this happens, colleagues and other practitioners can more easily learn from the research.

Specifically, Practitioner Leaders need support to develop their work plans, lead research and professional development activities, connect with other researchers, clearly document their work and its outcomes, reflect on their growth as teachers and researchers, share experiences and ideas with other Practitioner Leaders, and view themselves as part of a network.

Practitioner Leaders need help and training from someone within their state and/or from a national organization such as NCSALL (a member of the state professional development system or a PDRN Coordinator) whose job it is to help Practitioner Leaders think about not only about their PDRN work, but also what they need to do the job well and grow.

- Adequate time for their research, professional development, and outreach work. Time is crucial and needs to be built into their current jobs, not added on. Practitioners play a critical role in any system to connect practice and research; this cannot be done solely through the state professional development system. Therefore, practitioners who are Practitioner Leaders need to be funded for their time. There are two considerations in paying practitioners to be involved in connecting practice and research work. First, the stipend has to cover enough hours to keep the work consistently at the forefront of their minds; we were able to pay Practitioner Leaders to work only 100 hours a year (an average of 2 hours a week). For many, this involved working one day a month, or even spurts of two days and then none at all for several months. If the stipend and the job were 25 percent or even 50 percent of the Practitioner Leaders' time, it would become a more consistent commitment, and they could regularly engage in dissemination activities. Second, we discovered that full-time practitioners, for whom working in the field of adult literacy is a career, are more likely to be able to make the commitment to this type of work. However, full-time practitioners will not be able to add outside work equaling even 5–10 percent time to their existing ABE jobs—they don't have enough time in their lives. Therefore, if practitioners are to take on the responsibility of conducting activities connecting practice and research, they need to be paid through their existing jobs. This means funding ABE programs to free up some of their teaching time and paying them through the program to be a Practitioner Leader.

> More time must be given to allow a project like the PDRN to take root into the consciousness and core of such a loosely knit profession as adult education.
>
> **Susan Bubp, Practitioner Leader**

> (The job of Practitioner Leader) certainly needs to be more than 100 hours per year, but I would hate to lose the practitioner part of it because I think that is part of its success. This is somebody who is coming from the field who is actually using the research in their practice and who can get the message out that this stuff is usable and this is how we were using it. I think that the more connected to the field the person is, the better.
>
> **New England State Team Member**

- Clear roles and responsibilities. In an attempt to be "participatory," we initially left the Practitioner Leaders' dissemination activities fairly undefined. This ended up making the Practitioner Leaders feel confused about whether they were "doing the right thing" in their states. In the second year, we developed a solid list of outreach, research, and professional development activities for each Practitioner Leader. This was an improvement over "making it up as you go along," but too structured for some Practitioner Leaders. Finally, in Year 3, we created an agreed-upon slate of activity categories that each Practitioner Leader would do (i.e., some outreach, something that is a real collaboration of research with a NCSALL researcher, some professional development). With the PDRN Coordinator's help, each Practitioner Leader developed individualized work plans identifying their specific outreach, research, and professional development activities. Each Practitioner Leader's work plan was thus unique but shared the same parameters as that of all other Practitioner Leaders. This seemed to work best because it allowed the Practitioner Leaders (and the states in which they worked) to organize specific activities appropriate for their state, while ensuring that all Practitioner Leaders were doing the same types of activities.

For local practitioners, necessary supports include:

- Activities—such as study circles and practitioner research—in which practitioners can engage with and be involved in their own and other researchers' research. One of the most effective activities helping practitioners learn about and use research is interactive professional development. It is an important beginning for them to receive good publications such as *Focus on Basics*, to search the Web for accessible information about research, or even to hear a conference presentation about research, but practitioners told us very clearly that to really "engage" with research, they need more than access to it. They need venues where they can hear about or read the research, talk with other practitioners about what it means, and strategize with other practitioners how to apply it in their own classrooms and programs. For this to happen, practitioners

need to be able to attend staff development activities that are more than one-shot "information out" sessions at a conference. They need to be able to participate in workshops, study circles, practitioner research, or other forms of professional development that meet over time and are set up specifically to address the findings of particular research.

For that reason, we developed a number of nine-hour study circles (3 three-hour sessions) in which practitioners, led by the Practitioner Leader, came together to read research reports, discuss what the findings mean, analyze the applicability of the findings to their own context, and devise strategies and techniques for putting those findings into practice. These study circles, which were well received by the participating practitioners, used research reports or occasional papers written by NCSALL researchers and others.

- A practitioner in the role of a "leader." Connecting practitioners with research and researchers calls for practitioner involvement at both the participation and leadership levels. Practitioner Leaders can assist other practitioners involved in connecting practice and research by providing training, ongoing support, and connections to larger research studies and researchers.

- Strong state involvement in planning, implementing, and sustaining high-quality research dissemination activities. People in the state (within the department of education and the staff development system) need to see this as part of their jobs, not just a good concept. Funding professional development activities and offering paid staff development release time are part of this. In addition, designating a staff person at the state level to help coordinate activities is critical. If connecting practice and research is to be anything more than haphazard, these resources need to be ongoing and built into a state's annual budget.

> Introducing practitioners to research around a critical issue, even at the level of the three- or four-part study circle, is not sufficient to ensure that the research has an impact on practice. Sustained learning processes that respect the professionalism of the participants and adapt to their changing needs are necessary. . . . Without ready commitment at the state level to support follow-through on research-to-practice projects, their impact is severely restricted.
>
> **David Hayes, Practitioner Leader**

> It would be highly beneficial for NCSALL to help the participant states develop financial commitment in terms of writing funding allowances into future state budgets that would allow for practitioners' participation in PDRN activities, not as an aid to NCSALL but as a benefit to state programs and a direct benefit to practitioners who meet student face to face.
>
> **Art LaChance, Practitioner Leader**

> In order for us to sustain that effort, we needed our staff development experts to receive that training (training in how to conduct practitioner research), and we were not included. If our statewide folks had been trained in that same system, we could continue to do practitioner research in all of our work.
>
> **New England State Team Member**

- Paid release time to attend any staff development, including study circles and practitioner research. Practitioner Leaders reported that practitioners in many states did not receive paid release time to attend staff development (or the flexible schedules permitting them to be released from their classes), so recruiting teachers to participate in study circles was sometimes difficult. Conducting any kind of connecting practice and research professional development activities will be difficult in states that do not provide teachers with paid staff development release time to participate.

> Any state system for professional development should not only offer to pay for participants, but should also readily offer full support of the processes and products the system uses and develops.
>
> **David Hayes, Practitioner Leader**

> There needs to be dedicated "hard money" from the federal government, through the Department of Education, to support adequate and high-quality professional development for ABE practitioners, so that there is an institutionalized structure within which research can be connected with practice.
>
> **Cristine Smith, PDRN Coordinator**

> When dedicated people are employed, both at the national and the state levels, the time and effort put in by researchers can be applied to the classroom in a thoughtful manner. Adult education, as a national field, should support staff development in the future. Funds should be appropriated on both the state and national level.
>
> **Sue Barton, Practitioner Leader**

To further support connections between practitioners and researchers, local program directors and state staff need a means to develop an understanding of and systems for practitioner research and research-based professional development. Practitioner Leaders felt they learned a great deal about activities that really help practitioners engage in learning about or conducting research. They felt that program directors or those at the state level didn't always have this same level of understanding and that it was crucial for state and program decision-makers to play a role in promoting practitioner research and research-based professional development, such as study circles. If directors, state administrators, or professional developers did not see the promise of activities for connecting practice and research, and the critical role that these activities play in actually changing practice, such activities were unlikely to be sponsored at the state or program level. Therefore, several Practitioner

Leaders talked about the need for professional development designed to help program directors and state staff understand the importance and process of practitioner involvement in research, and for structures or mechanisms to facilitate state and program staff understanding of research.

> If a systemic process could be developed to ensure such activity (research-to-practice professional development), then an argument could be made (with funders) for sustaining such efforts.
>
> **New England State Team Member**

> I have not seen much published information coming from the reality of the adult classroom, the type that could be generated and provided by practitioners functioning as researchers. Frankly, that is the most dependable source of the type of information needed by entry-level practitioners. How this would cut into teaching time and funding is a question that can only be answered at the state administrative levels, but it appears to me this is a win-win situation.
>
> **Art LaChance, Practitioner Leader**

> Looking at PDRN's impact on my teaching and the effect it had on my peers, it would seem important to follow up this experience with a promotional campaign directed at managers. If managers could be informed of the benefits (of practitioners doing research), and preferably offered the training necessary to implement a similar design in their areas, the concept of sharing peer research could be expanded considerably.
>
> **Tom Smith, Practitioner Leader**

> There is a need for a "culture" of professional development, one in which practitioners engage in professional development as a matter of course, not as an irregular, disconnected set of events.
>
> **New England State Team Member**

Perhaps the most important overall lesson we learned is that practitioners are interested in research. Conventional wisdom has long dictated that practitioners are wary of research or don't find it relevant, and this is certainly true for some practitioners. In presenting the PDRN experience at meetings and conferences in the past few years, we have come to understand more clearly that the driving factor for what most adult education teachers do in their classrooms is "what works." However, a critical part of teachers knowing "what works" is the concept "according to whom?" Some teachers want to know "what works" according to other teachers they respect. Teachers who use a reflective stance in their teaching learn "what works" according to their own experience and their learners' responses to classroom activities. Other teachers want to know "what works" according to research. The PDRN effort demonstrated that teachers are interested in what works according to research and use such information to improve their practice, but they (as well as their policymaker counterparts in adult education) need systematic strategies and supports to learn how

to be research consumers. The lessons of NCSALL's PDRN should inform a larger effort in the field to help teachers and policymakers learn how to integrate information about "what works" according to research with "what works" according to colleagues and their own experience.

Implications

In summary, we learned that connecting practitioners and researchers has a positive impact on them as professionals, and also on practice and research. We learned that successfully connecting practitioners and researchers requires specific *strategies* and *supports*—mechanisms and processes that allow them to focus on working together and to use what they learn from each other to improve the delivery of service to learners.

The overall implication of our work with the PDRN is that connecting researchers and practitioners in the field of adult learning and literacy will require a national system. Such a system can aid in the use of research findings in practice and in the design of research studies based on practice, thereby maximizing the investment of research funding in our field. Although the PDRN focused solely on mechanisms for connecting practice and research, we now believe that such a system should connect policy and research as well.

Successful elements of the PDRN should inform the development of this system. Such a system should:

- Operate in every state
- Involve all adult literacy research and researchers
- Include both professional development and policy-setting activities in each state

What we learned from the PDRN has several implications for any national system to connect research and practice:

1. The system must include professional development activities, such as study circles and practitioner research, to help practitioners understand and use research.
2. The system must include policy-setting activities, such as policy problem-solving seminars, that help policymakers understand and use research.
3. Practitioners must be involved as leaders and participants, and researchers must connect with them.
4. Each state must be involved as a key player, planning how to integrate research, practice, and policy activities into their state goals.

5. There must be a way for practitioners and policymakers to provide input into national-level research agenda setting, funding, and design.

We discuss each of these implications in more detail below.

Implication 1: The system must include professional development activities, such as study circles and practitioner research, to help practitioners understand and use research.

Professional development using the results of recent research as content would be a critical part of a system to connect research and practice. Practitioners need activities—in addition to materials such as *Focus on Basics* (a quarterly publication that "translates" research into practical strategies for teachers) —that help them, with other practitioners, to read and understand research and decide whether and how to use such findings in their programs and classrooms. Study circles and practitioner research were particularly useful in the PDRN. These and other professional development activities that engage practitioners in thinking about new research should be incorporated into the professional development systems in each state. This will require funding from the federal and state governments to support delivery of research-based professional development activities, and to support practitioners' participation in them. It will also require technical assistance for states in which delivery of research-based professional development is new.

Implication 2: The system must include policy-setting activities, such as policy problem-solving seminars, that help policymakers understand and use research.

Sessions in which policymakers use new research to solve problems and suggest new policies for better service delivery should be a critical feature of the system in each state. Policymakers at the state level (state staff, program directors, and leaders of private organizations involved in adult literacy and education, such as libraries, correctional systems, and churches) also need opportunities to come together, learn about, and strategize how to use new research findings. However, because the PDRN did not pilot policy problem-solving seminars, our only implication can be that seminars and other mechanisms to engage state and local policymakers in using recent research findings to set policy should be an area of experimentation.

Implication 3: Practitioners must be involved as leaders and participants, and researchers must connect with them.

Sufficient funding must be allocated to support this. Researchers—those conducting adult literacy-related research at both the national and state levels—must be involved with practitioners as co-researchers and investigators, and structures are needed for them to interact and work with practitioners in sustained, meaningful, face-to-face ways.

The PDRN only experimented with connecting NCSALL researchers with practitioners in states and did not attempt to connect adult literacy researchers at local and state universities to the practitioners within their states. Therefore, any national system will have to experiment with mechanisms to connect all researchers through their state systems, as well as find ways to overcome geographical barriers to connecting national researchers to researchers at the state level.

Implication 4: Each state must be involved as a key player, planning how to integrate research, practice, and policy activities into their state goals.

Each state will need an ongoing process for planning how to integrate research, practice, and policy activities into their current systems for improving service delivery. The particular research states focus on disseminating each year should support the goals they have set. Each state will need to assess its current strategies and the supports identified in the lessons learned through the PDRN to determine what already exists and what must be added to help connect practitioners and researchers. This will require funding at the state, national, and research-study level, as well as technical assistance and coordination to support the people and planning processes involved.

Implication 5: There must be a way for practitioners and policymakers to provide input into national-level research agenda setting, funding, and design.

Within the PDRN, researchers had a way to get direct and face-to-face feedback about how their research could be designed and about the problems practitioners face that research should solve. The focus groups the PDRN conducted in the first year also provided a way for practitioners within states to have input into a national agenda for research.

If a system for connecting practice, policy, and research is to work effectively, it can't only be a process of "research to practice." Practitioner Leaders clearly expressed the opinion that research funding and design should be based on

the real needs of practice and incorporate practitioners' input. Ongoing and systematic processes are needed within each state for practitioners and policymakers to identify the problems they face in improving service delivery that research can help them address. Information about these problems, as well as research design suggestions, should have an established mechanism to reach those who fund and design research.

We would anticipate two positive results from such mechanisms to provide feedback and input to researchers: Research would more likely address the real needs of those working in adult literacy at the grassroots level, and practitioners and policymakers would be better prepared for—one might say, "looking forward to"—the research as it comes because they were more involved in advocating for it. In short, practitioners and policymakers would become more active research consumers. The PDRN project demonstrated that the value of practitioners looking forward to research, as well as the value of researchers looking forward to practitioners' involvement, cannot be underestimated.

Next Steps

In its second five-year phase of operations, NCSALL is working to support the development of a national system for connecting practice, policy, and research for the field of adult learning and literacy. In collaboration with NIFL, the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium, and other individuals and organizations in the field of adult literacy, NCSALL will begin to pilot the Connecting Practice, Policy and Research (CPPR) initiative in selected states. In these states, we will develop processes similar to the activities conducted under the PDRN to help practitioners and policymakers access, understand, judge, and use research. Through the experiences in these pilot states, we will begin to understand how the CPPR processes work when integrated with professional development and policy-setting mechanisms various states already have in place. NCSALL will also continue to "translate" new research findings into materials (such as *Focus on Basics*) and activities (such as study circles and policy problem-solving seminars) that can be used within the pilot states to engage practitioners and policymakers in learning about and applying recent research results.

As a result of these efforts, we hope by 2006 to be further down the road to establishing a national system in which practitioners and researchers can be better connected, problems and concerns of practitioners make their way into the design and funding of adult literacy-related research that better serves the field, and improvements in practice and policy are made based on solid research conducted by both practitioners and researchers, working together

APPENDIX: PDRN CHRONOLOGY

Pre-PDRN	
December 1995	Proposal developed
PDRN Year 1	
August 1996	NCSALL funded
October 1996	Advisory group meeting in Boston
March 1997	Southeast regional meeting: Practitioner Leaders and state teams
May 1997	Northeast regional meeting
Summer 1997	Research agenda focus groups conducted
July 1997	National meeting, Boston National staff meeting
PDRN Year 2	
September 1997	PDRN listserve initiated
March 1998	Work begins to establish the Mid-Atlantic PDRN
May 1998	Southeast regional meeting
July 1998	Staff retreat in Massachusetts
July 1998	*Practitioners Speak* is published (report of research agenda focus groups)
July 1998	Northeast regional meeting
PDRN Year 3	
1999 2000	Practitioner research training and projects (included a series of four full-day training sessions between November 1999 and June 2000)
Spring 1999	First three study circle guides developed and piloted
July 1999	National meeting, Tennessee
PDRN Year 4	
Spring and Fall 2000	Southeast and Northeast regional meetings
June 2000	Staff retreat, Massachusetts
PDRN Year 5	
Winter 2001	Evaluation data collected and organized
May 2001	National meeting, Massachusetts

NCSALL

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

NCSALL's Mission

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) provides information used to improve practice in programs that offer adult basic education, English for speakers of other languages, and adult secondary education. In pursuit of this goal, NCSALL has undertaken research in four areas: learner motivation, classroom practice and the teaching/learning interaction, staff development, and assessment.

NCSALL conducts basic and applied research; builds partnerships between researchers and practitioners; disseminates research and best practices to practitioners, scholars, and policymakers; and works with the field of adult literacy education to develop a comprehensive research agenda.

NCSALL is a partnership of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, World Education, Rutgers University, Portland State University in Oregon, and the Center for Literacy Studies at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. NCSALL receives funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Institute for Postsecondary Education, Libraries, and Lifelong Learning; the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds; the National Institute for Literacy; and the Office of Vocational and Adult Education.

NCSALL's Dissemination Initiative

NCSALL's dissemination initiative focuses on ensuring that the research results reach practitioners, administrators, policymakers, and scholars of adult education through print, electronic, and face-to-face communication. NCSALL publishes research reports, occasional papers, research briefs, and teaching and training materials; the quarterly journal *Focus on Basics*; and *The Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy*, a scholarly review of major issues, current research, and best practices.

For more information about NCSALL, to download free copies of NCSALL publications, or to purchase bound copies, please visit:

http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

	This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.
X	This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").